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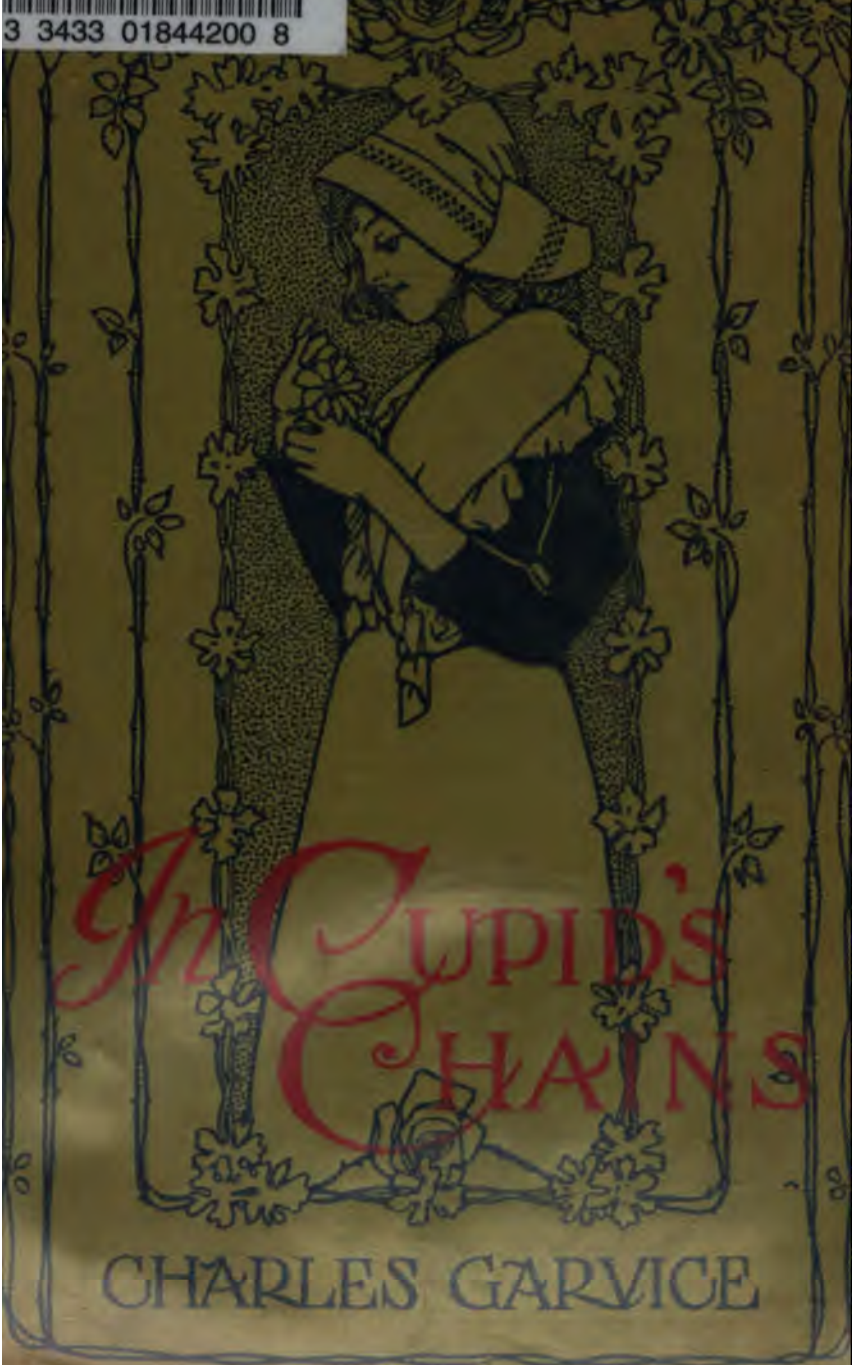
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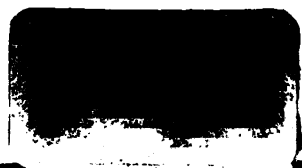
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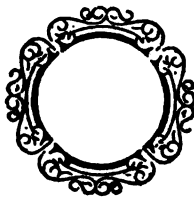


In Cupid's Chains

OR A SLAVE FOR LIFE

BY CHARLES GARVICE

Author of "Once in a Life," "'Twas Love's Fault,"
"Better Than Life," "A Life's Mistake,"
"The Outcast of the Family," etc.



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IN CUPID'S CHAINS.

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CHAPTER I.

A YOUNG girl sat upon a rustic seat in an old-fashioned garden. She sat in the attitude beloved of "maidens of fifteen;" that is to say, with one leg tucked under her, the other swinging easily, with one hand holding a book, the other, with the arm belonging to it, lying along the top of the back of the bench.

It was spring-time, and she was dressed in white, with a small bow of black ribbon at her throat.

Above her was an old apple-tree, which occasionally dropped a blossom or two, in a quiet, lover-like fashion, upon her hair and her dress. She was an extremely pretty and rather remarkable-looking girl; remarkable principally by reason of the contrast between her hair and her eyes. The former was dark, almost black, the latter of a dazzling blue or gray. So strange, so unexpected was their coloring, so vivid and eloquent their expression, that, when the long, dark lashes were raised and she looked at you, you felt surprised and startled; for one expects dark eyes with black hair, just as one looks for blue with fair.

She was tall for her age, and, naturally, slim and supple; her attitude was full of the grace of a young savage. The hands were brown and slightly freckled; but they were beautifully shaped, and, in their way, as expressive as the eyes. The sun had kissed her face as well as her hands, and her well-formed lips—not by any means of a doll-like smallness—shone red against her delicately brown skin. There was a long rent in the white dress.

A strangely pretty girl who would be a strangely beautiful woman.

It is very probable that if the poet had seen her he would have written "Sweet fifteen" instead of "seventeen."

At a little distance from the bench stood a cottage of old red stone which the ivy had nearly turned into a bower. All

round her were beds of sweet-smelling flowers, white and crimson stocks, yellow and red wall-flowers, crimson and garish peonies; the air was fragrant with their perfume and that of the lilac, now nearly over, so that she sat in the midst of a garden as fine and smart as herself—a juvenile *Rosamund* in her bower.

Now and again she raised her eyes from her book and glanced round her with a dreamy expression, and seemed to listen to the twitter of the birds and the humming of the bees, and once or twice she herself hummed a fragment of a song as if in sympathy with Nature's musicians. From where she sat she could not see beyond the tall shrubs which inclosed the little garden; but if she had stood on the seat, instead of lying on it in the most picturesque attitude possible, she would have been able to see the upper part of the great house—Chesney Chase—whose magnificent gardens were only divided from this little domain of hers by the thick hedge of lilac and laurustine. As it was, she could, without moving, hear the great clock in the central tower of the Chase chime the quarters, and see the tame pigeons flit to and from their home just above the clock itself.

It was so still that it might have been a part of the palace gardens of the Sleeping Beauty; and the girl was almost, but not quite, startled, when the "slumberous silence" was broken by the barkings of dogs and the sound of a voice calling to them.

She raised her eyes from her book, but only for a moment, and was returning to the absorbing page, when right through the laurels came bounding a big mastiff and a fox-terrier, followed, an instant after, by a lad.

He was laughing and shouting to the dogs, quite unconscious of her presence; but when he saw her the laughter and the shouting ceased, and he stood stock still regarding her. He was a handsome lad, with bright, wavy hair and dark, flashing eyes. He wore an Eton suit, rather the worse for wear and dusty dog's paws.

At sight of the girl, the color had rushed to his face, and he caught his breath, so to speak, with the involuntary bashfulness of a boy. But she neither colored nor looked awkward nor embarrassed, but regarded him with the steady regard of her wonderful eyes and only the faintest expression of surprise.

The awkwardness, which was not altogether unbecoming, clung to him as he raised his hat, and his voice faltered slightly as he said:

"I—I beg your pardon! I didn't know you were here; I didn't know"—he looked round him—"that anybody was likely to be here."

"Yes?" she said, without a smile, and with a gravity, which, if he had been older, would have increased his embarrassment tenfold; but youth is full of courage, and though he thought her the most beautiful thing he had ever seen or dreamed of, his nervousness was slowly disappearing.

"No. You needn't be afraid; he won't bite."

She dropped the book in her lap, and laid her slim, girlish hand on the dog's huge, smooth head.

"I'm not afraid. Why should he bite me?"

"Why, indeed!" he would have liked to have responded—fervently responded—but his courage was not equal to that, so he said instead:

"Are you fond of dogs?"

She considered the question for a moment, while he wondered what it was about her eyes which made it seem impossible for him to look away from them.

"Yes," she said at last, as if she had come to a decision—

"yes, I like dogs, and horses, and all animals—except cats."

"I don't care for cats," he remarked, quickly, as if he were glad to have found some bond of sympathy with her, however slight. "Neither does Tozer."

"Which is Tozer?" she asked.

He touched with his foot the fox-terrier, who instantly jumped up and around him, eager for a game or a caress.

"Shut up, Tozer!" he said, as if the dog's yapping jarred upon him in this exquisitely quiet spot. "He's a noisy wretch, but he's a well-bred dog."

"Is he?"

"Yes," he answered. "Look at his head. Did you ever see more points than he's got?"

She regarded the dog, who squatted in front of her, looking up at her face with the wistful affection which shines so piteously in the eyes of dogs and horses.

"I don't see many points—more points than in other dogs," she replied, thoughtfully.

He seemed disappointed for a moment, then his face cleared.

"Oh, I see; you mean the points of his nose and his ears, and that sort of thing. I mean the points the judges at the show count."

"I see," she said, reflectingly, and still dreamily regarding the dog.

The lad took off his felt hat, and wiped his forehead.

"Isn't it hot for this time of year?" he remarked. "No wonder they're thirsty!" and he looked at the red tongues protruding sideways from the dogs' mouths.

"They look very thirsty," she said. "I'll get them some water."

"No, no, no," he hastened to remonstrate. "I didn't mean—"

But she had gone, and he looked regretfully from the sea; where she had sat to the cottage which had swallowed up her dazzling presence. Then he went to the seat, and was going to take up the book, but he drew his hand back, and colored faintly with shame—it is not good manners to look at a lady's book in her absence.

She came back presently—very quickly indeed, though it seemed a long time to him, and set down a bowl of water before the mastiff and the terrier.

"Oh, thanks very much," said the lad; "it is very kind of you. How they enjoy it, don't they?"

Something in his tone caused her to glance up at him.

"Are you thirsty, too?" she said.

"Oh, no, no! not at all," he made haste to declare; but a woman, even in her girlhood, is quick to read a man's accents aright, and with a faint smile she went into the cottage again.

This time she brought out a cup of milk. He took it with a bend of the head, and his hat in his hand; and she watched him through the veil of her lashes as he drank.

"Oh, that was good!" he said. "*I was* thirsty! How did you know it?"

She smiled, and went back to the bench, and sat down—but not with one leg curled under the other; and the lad put on his hat as if he were going to take his departure; but he turned toward her wistfully.

"Would you mind telling me what you're reading?" he asked, with a very becoming modesty.

She looked up as if she had forgotten his presence.

"'Robinson Crusoe,'"

He nodded with boyish approval.

"Stunning, isn't it? I say, which part do you like best? I like all the first of 'Crusoe;' the second's rot. But I mean which part of the first? I like where he finds Friday."

She nodded thoughtfully.

"Has yours any pictures?"

"Yes." She held the book out to him.

He came and sat down beside her on the bench, and they

looked at the cook together, with the frankness of boy and girl, the unconsciousness of a puppy and a kitten on the same hearth-rug.

"I've got a better edition than that," he said, presently. "More pictures; some of 'em colored ones. I'll bring it and show it you—that is, if you'd care to see it, and if you'll be here."

"Thank you," she said, calmly, with no superfluity of gratitude. "Be here? How do you mean? I am always here;" and she glanced around.

"I didn't know," he explained. "You see, I'm a stranger myself, and I thought you might be just a visitor, too."

"Why, I live here!" opening her grave eyes upon him.

"In that cottage?" he asked, with evident interest and curiosity.

"Yes," she replied, "that is my grandfather's cottage. He is the head gardener here; but perhaps you know that."

"No," he said. "I only came yesterday—last night—and I haven't met any of the gardeners to notice."

She eyed him with a kind of solemn pride.

"You would not be likely to meet him," she said. "He is not like any of the ordinary gardeners. He is the *head* gardener."

"Yes?"

"He doesn't work with a spade or anything of that kind, or go about in his shirt-sleeves. He says he would like to," she added, parenthetically, as if constrained to do so by her innate honesty; "but he says he hasn't the time. Do you know how many gardeners there are at the Chase?"

"No; I don't know anything about it," he replied, almost meekly.

"Sixteen or seventeen," she said, "and grandfather has enough to do to superintend them. He is very learned. He is a botanist; he knows the Latin name of every flower and plant, and everything about it—the very tiniest thing that you or I wouldn't notice."

"I dare say," said the lad. "It's precious little Latin I know, worse luck, and little or no botany. And what is his name?"

He thought this a very artful way of getting at hers, and lowered his eyes, but the girl replied at once:

"Gordon—Herbert Gordon, B.A."

"He's a regular swell, I see," said the lad.

She leaned back with a faint smile of satisfaction at having

convinced him of the difference between her grandfather and an ordinary gardener.

"And—and is that your name, too?" he ventured to ask; as it occurred to him that, after all, it might not be.

"Yes; not Herbert, of course. My name is Madge."

"Madge?" He repeated the name under his breath as if he liked it, then waited to see if she would ask his, but she did not. He seemed disappointed. It was evident that she did not take any interest in him, while he— It is generally supposed that a boy—especially a public-school boy—of sixteen or seventeen is incapable of admiration of one of the other sex. It is a mistake. The boy's nerves were quivering with admiration, curiosity, and a warmer feeling which surprised and slightly annoyed him.

"And I suppose you go about with him and see all the flowers, and all that?" he remarked.

She shook her head.

"Oh, no. I have never been in the great gardens."

"No?"

"No, I never go beyond that gate you came in by. I forgot; you came through the hedge, though."

"Yes; I beg your pardon! I didn't know you were here. But you go into the road?"

"Oh, yes; it is only into the great gardens that side of the hedge that I may not go."

"But why not?" he demanded, with a faint touch of indignation mingling with his curiosity. "They are first-rate, stunning, quite stunning—they're bigger than this; however, this is awfully jolly and nice."

She shook her head and gave her shoulders a little shrug.

"I don't know. The first day I came—that's three years ago—grandfather said I was not to go beyond that gate."

The boy stared.

"But *why*?"

She hesitated a moment.

"I think it is because the earl does not like strangers—especially women."

She said this as if she were at least forty.

"Not like women—but why not?" he demanded. "I know he's rather rum and—and grumpy; people with the gout always are, aren't they; but—"

"Is he—what did you say—'rum'? I don't know. I never saw him. Once I heard him talking to my grandfather, on the other side of the hedge—at least, I think it

must have been the earl, because grandfather called him 'my lord.' "

"Yes, that was the earl, I dare say," he said.

Then, after a moment:

"And you live, shut in here? Well, it's awfully pretty."

He leaned back in the seat and looked round. Boy as he was, the spirit of the place seemed to fall upon him, to encompass and permeate him.

"And have you any brother or sister?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"No; I haven't any one but grandfather," she replied.

"We are quite alone."

"And isn't it dull?" he asked.

She looked at him as if she were asking herself the question.

"Dull? I don't know; I never thought of it. No, I suppose not."

"Oh, come! It must be sometimes, don't you know," he remonstrated. "*I* should feel awfully slack if I was shut up here."

"That's because you're a boy," she remarked, with a girl's superiority. "Boys are always"—she hunted about for a word—"difficult to amuse. They can't rest for long together, and they can't sew or paint pictures. They can only play cricket and football."

"Oh, can't they!" he said, with *his* accent of superiority now. "They can do a lot more than that. Besides, you needn't be so hard on us. *You're* reading a boy's book this very minute!"

She smiled, and was about to retort, when the dogs, who, unnoticed, had been snarling in an undertone, suddenly rose, and ran growling toward the gate.

The boy called them back, but the gate opened, and another lad appeared, and they ran at him, not very threateningly, but rather noisily.

The new-comer was a tall, thin boy, with a pale face and dark hair, which hung straight and damply. He was not a good-looking boy at the best of times; at this moment fear did not improve his countenance.

He uttered a sharp cry of alarm, his eyes—they were small and very dark—distended, and he raised the stick he carried, and struck Tozer an ugly blow.

Tozer howled and fled, whining piteously, and the lad on the seat sprang to his feet and hurried forward, his face red, his eyes flashing with indignation.

"I say, what did you hit my dog for?" he demanded, angrily, and with true public-school grammar.

The dark-haired lad stood and glowered at him in silence for a moment.

"Why did he fly at me?" he asked, and his voice had an unpleasant sound in it—a sinister, sneering tone which matched his eyes.

"It didn't fly at you," said the other, indignantly. "He only made up to you, as dogs will. You hit him because you were in a funk—you coward!"

The lad with the stick grew paler, his eyes flickered passionately, and, without a word of warning, he aimed a kind of savage blow at his accuser.

Now, unnoticed by the two disputants, the girl had slipped off the bench and approached them, and at this critical juncture she stepped before her companion, and received the blow upon her arm.

The boy in the Eton jacket uttered a cry of rage, and, pushing her aside, none too gently, flung himself upon his assailant. There was a moment or two of fierce struggle—to which the dogs obliged with an accompaniment—then the stick was sent whirling over the hedge, and its late owner was flattened out upon the path. The victor stood over him with clinched fists and flashing eyes.

"Get up!" he said. "Get up again, and let's have it out, if you're a man!"

But the passion of the prostrate one seemed to have vanished with his stick. He lay glowering up at the handsome face above him, with an evil scowl on his pale face, a vindictive gleam in his small eyes.

"Get up!" repeated the Eton boy. "You are a coward!"

The girl put her hand on his arm—her left hand.

"Come away," she said, "come away; I command you!"

There was something almost queenly in her tone and air, something which bent the boy's spirit to instant submission. He stepped back, and picking up his hat, bowed his head before her.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered. "A fellow oughtn't to fight before ladies; but—"

"I know," she said quite quietly.

Without looking at the other boy, who had slowly got to his feet, she raised her hand, and pointing to the gate, said:

"You can go, Silas Fletcher."

He stood for a moment brushing the gravel from his clothes with a shaking hand, his eyes wandering from one face to the

other; then, compressing his lips tightly, as if he was keeping back a torrent of abuse, he turned and went out.

The victor, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself, stood with downcast eyes.

"I'm awfully sorry," he began; but she interrupted him as quietly as before, but not with the touch of queenliness.

"It was not your fault. He had no right to hit the dog. Poor dog! Come here."

Tozer crawled to her, and she took it up in her arms.

"Is he hurt, do you think? No, it was his fault. But he can not help it. He is a bad-tempered boy."

"Who is he?" he asked.

"He is Mr. Fletcher's, the steward's, son." She winced and put Tozer down suddenly as she spoke, and the boy noticed both the wince and the suddenness of the action.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, half ruefully, half impatiently. "You're hurt! I forgot! That cad hit you, didn't he? Where did he hit you? That's the worst of girls, they will interfere! Why didn't you stay where you were? You don't suppose I couldn't manage him! Why, I'd fight him with one hand tied behind my back!"

She looked at him—a strange look in a girl so young.

"Yes," she said, under her breath, "I think you could."

"But are you hurt?" he asked. "You don't mean to say that he hit your arm? The brute! Let me see, won't you? Do!"

She drew back.

"No, no!" she said, in a low voice. "It was nothing. I tell you it was nothing!" She stamped her foot slightly.

He looked at her with all a boy's stubbornness.

"I don't believe you," he said. "What makes you so pale?"

"I'm *not* hurt," she responded, almost angrily.

"Yes, you are," he retorted. "And I won't believe you're not hurt unless you show me your arm."

"I shall not," she said, setting her teeth. "I wish you'd go, please!"

"Not till you show me your arm," he said.

She tore back the sleeve, and thrust the arm almost under his eyes.

"There, then, you see!" she said.

But her voice faltered at the last words, for, to her surprise, there was a stripe of dull red crimson across the ivory white.

He uttered an exclamation of rage and indignation.

"There! I knew it! I'll—I'll wring his neck! What shall I do? Let me bathe it."

He took the arm by the wrist—gently, reverently—but she snatched it from his grasp, and, with a laugh and a swift "Good-bye!" ran off into the cottage.

CHAPTER II.

THE next day, at the same hour, Madge and "Robinson Crusoe" were in their accustomed place in the cottage garden, as it was called; and though Madge read as before, yet she looked round more frequently, and now and again listened intently.

It was true that the lad, when he had promised to bring his "Robinson Crusoe," had not stated any time; but Madge thought it not unlikely that he would come in the afternoon, and at the same hour as yesterday; and, though she would not have admitted it for worlds—for your girl of fifteen has quite as much, if not more, pride as your woman of five-and-twenty—she was waiting and longing for him.

You see it would have been rather difficult to forget him, even if she had tried to do so, for she had a particularly acute remembrancer in the shape of a long, dark bruise on the arm, which ached most persistently and unpleasantly. Once or twice she had woken in the night, and, lighting a candle, had looked at the mark; but each time with a singular, though unacknowledged sense of satisfaction, notwithstanding the pain.

Somehow, she would rather have had the bruise and the aching than not. She had a dull consciousness of being, in some vague kind of way, a heroine; at any rate, she knew that she was glad that the blow had fallen on her arm rather than on the boy, and she shuddered as she thought of the ugly mark it would have made on his handsome face. It didn't seriously matter in her case, because it was hidden. Every woman of fifteen to fifty takes an interest in the man she has saved from hurt, whether it be moral or physical. She wondered who he was, but with only an indefinite curiosity. Very few visitors came to the Chase, and none had hitherto visited the cottage garden.

An hour—two—slipped away as she partly read and partly thought, and though she was at the most interesting part of Robinson Crusoe's marvelous adventures, she began to feel dissatisfied and restless. Once there came some footsteps

across the lawn, but she scarcely looked up, for she knew they were her grandfather's.

Mr. Gordon was a short, old man, with gray hair. He walked slowly, with downcast, near-sighted eyes, and with a preoccupied manner. As he passed from the cottage to the gate leading to the great gardens, he raised his head and looked at her absently.

"Reading, as usual, Madge?" he said.

She nodded.

"Yes, grandfather. Do you want me?"

"No, no," he said, and, stooping to pick a sprig of white stock, he went on and passed through the gate. For the first time since she had come to Chesney she looked after him with envy, as if she would have liked to follow him, and for the first time asked herself why she was forbidden to cross beyond this mystic border. Another day had elapsed, and with an unconscious sigh she was just rising to go in-doors, when the boy vaulted over the gate and came quickly toward her.

He was out of breath, as if he had been running, and he threw himself down beside her, panting a little.

"I'm awfully sorry I'm so late," he said; "but I was kept."

"Are you late?" she said, curtly. "You didn't say what time you would come, and I thought you'd forgotten all about it," she added, innocently giving herself away.

"Forgotten to come?" he repeated, with a reproachful stare. "And after what you did for me yesterday? By George, it *was* plucky of you! You might have been a boy! How is your arm? Look here, I've brought something that will take the bruise out—for I know it must be bruised. You lift up your sleeve and I'll put it on;" and with eager gravity he drew out a small paper parcel from his pocket, opened it, and displayed a lump of raw steak.

"I got our *chef* to give it to me," he explained, unconscious of the shuddering horror in her eyes. "Just hold out your arm—"

"Oh, throw it away—throw it away at once! It's horrid!" she gasped. "I'd rather die than have it near me!"

He stared at her.

"Why, it's the best thing in the world," he explained.

"Prize-fighters always use it; they do, indeed."

"I'm not a prize-fighter, and I tell you I won't have it near me. Throw it away, or I'll go in and never speak to you evermore."

"Oh, very well," he said, with a shrug that beautifully

expressed a boy's disgust and contempt for a girl's unreasonableness, and he pitched the objectionable piece of meat over the hedge.

"Did you bring the book?" she asked.

"Yes," he said; and he lugged it out of his pocket.

"Wipe your hands!" she commanded him.

"What for?"

"Why, you have been touching that horrible mess—"

"Oh, all right," he assented, patiently. "By George! I've forgotten my pocket-handkerchief."

"Here, take this," and she held out hers.

He wiped his hands, remarking:

"They're quite clean, all the same," and held out the handkerchief to her; but she declined it with a shake of the head.

"You can keep it. I wouldn't touch it for worlds."

"You're mighty particular," he said. "But you're a girl, and can't help it, I suppose;" and he stuffed the little handkerchief in his pocket, where it must have been rather astonished at its companions—a piece of string, two broken cigarettes, a penknife, and a dilapidated stick of chocolate.

Then he opened the book, and they looked over it together.

"It's better than yours, isn't it?" he said, with profound satisfaction. "We've got a lot of other jolly books, but I like 'Robinson Crusoe' the best; don't you?"

"Yes," she said. "Most of the other books have got love stories in them."

"You don't like them?"

"No," she said, with a grave contempt. "The people talk such rubbish. They make me laugh."

"But I suppose there's something in it," he remarked, looking straight before him. "I expect if you were older that you'd like it just as other people do."

She drew herself up, and looked down at him.

"Do you know how old I am?"

He scanned her face with all a boy's directness; and yet a sense of her beauty must have stirred within him, for his eyes wandered from her wonderful ones round the garden, and then, as if unwillingly, back to them again.

"No," he said at last. "Girls' ages are difficult to tell."

"I'm fifteen," she said, haughtily.

"Oh! that's nothing," he retorted. "I'm sixteen."

She looked him over.

"You don't seem very much older than I am," she remarked, sagaciously.

"No, I don't," he admitted, "but—but, well, I *am*."

This was unanswerable, and for a moment there was silence; then she said, *apropos* of nothing:

"I told you my name last night."

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me yours?"

"You didn't ask me," he retorted, ingenuously.

"Well, I ask you now," she said, with an admirably feigned indifference.

"Norman Eldred Beauchamp Fitz-George Lechmere," he said.

"Is that all?" she asked, with a twinkle in the gray-blue eyes.

He colored.

"Oh, it's easy to chaff a poor beggar about his name, as if he could help it. I didn't choose 'em. It's awful rot, giving a fellow such a string—"

"Like a bead necklace," she interjected.

"If they'd called me Robinson, or Friday, now, there'd have been some sense in it."

"Never mind," she said.

"You can call me which you like best," he said, generously.

"Thank you; but I can't remember more than the first, and that's rather pretty, I think."

"All right," he said. "And—and may I call you Madge?"

"If you like," she assented, indifferently.

"Thank you. It's a pretty name."

There was another pause; then she said:

"And are you going to stay here long?"

"I don't know," he replied, thoughtfully. "I may be packed off any moment. Yesterday, in the morning, I wished they'd let me go, for it was awfully slack, all alone in the house there, but"—he looked round as if he were rather puzzled—"but since then I've rather wanted to stay."

She thought over this for a second or two.

"And why are you all alone there?" she asked.

He grinned.

"Because there's nobody with me."

"That's clever, you think," she remarked, curving her delicately cut upper lip. "Anybody could have said that."

"I know. I beg your pardon. I meant that the earl doesn't show up much. He keeps to his own rooms. I've only seen him once since I came, and then only for a few

moments, and there's nothing to do, and no one to talk to, and the whole place is like—like a church; it's all so quiet and glum. And the butler and the rest of the servants look at you as if they expected you might go off bang! like a fire-work, any moment."

"I see. Then you won't come again?"

"Well, I don't know," he said. "There, that's the best picture in the book—where he's firing at the savages. Jolly, isn't it? I should have liked to have been there, shouldn't you? Oh, about coming to the Chase again. I don't know. Yesterday I thought I shouldn't, that wild horses wouldn't drag me here if I could help it; but—I don't know. Yes, I shouldn't mind coming back—that is, if—if you were here still. But I suppose you wouldn't be?"

"Oh, yes, I should," she said.

"Well, you mightn't be; you never can tell. Besides, I mightn't come again for some time, and then—well, perhaps it would be all different."

"How—different?" she asked, as she turned over the leaves of the book which they held between them.

"Well, you'd be grown up, for one thing, and very likely you'd be married."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't," she said, decisively.

He shook his head doubtfully.

"Girls always are when they're grown up, that's the worst of it."

"Not more than boys—they couldn't be," she retorted, with feminine logic.

He laughed.

"Oh, that's all right. But I should hate to come back and find you were married."

"Should you?" she said, dreamily, but with not an atom of coquetry.

"Yes," he said. A pause. "I shouldn't mind marrying you myself."

She did not blush—why should she? It was so entirely a business-like and unsentimental admission.

"Should you not?"

"No," he said; and he looked at her with a pleased, a frankly satisfied admiration. "I think you are the jolliest girl I ever met. Most girls have such nonsense about them; they're so stuck up and affected. Now you—oh, you're more like a boy, you know."

"Am I?" thoughtfully.

"Yes." A pause. "I say—"

"Well?"

He leaned his head on his arm, resting along the back of the seat, and looked at her with a frank eagerness, as if a splendid idea had just struck him—an idea of which he was not unreasonably proud.

"I tell you what! I'll make a bargain with you, if you like. But"—with a sudden qualm of modesty—"I'm afraid you won't like it."

As she was speaking, the thin, lank form of Silas Fletcher came softly along the path on the other side of the shrubbery. He evidently caught the sound of their voices, for he stopped and listened. Then, with a cautious glance over the wide expanse of the great gardens, he slid into the bushes and softly, cunningly insinuated himself as near as possible to the rustic seat. His face, framed by the leaves, bore a remarkable likeness to the conventional Satyr, save that no Satyr ever wore so sinister and ugly an expression.

"What is it?" asked Madge. "I can't say till you tell me."

"Well, it's this," he responded, with only the slightest hesitation: "I was going to say that if you'd promise to stop here and not alter—"

"Not grow up?"

"Oh, if you're going to laugh and make game of it—" he exclaimed, with momentary pettishness.

"No, no; go on."

"If you'll stop here and wait for me, I'll come back some day, and—and— You're not laughing?"

She shook her head, her lovely eyes resting on his innocently, waitingly.

"Well—I'll marry you."

She neither started nor blushed. She did not even laugh, but regarded him for awhile gravely, steadily, so that he felt fascinated by the glory of the gray-blue eyes under their black lashes. Then, silently, she looked away from him.

"You don't like the idea," he said, with a crestfallen air.

"I'm—I'm sorry, because—"

He stopped, and she turned her eyes upon him questioningly.

—"Because I like you very much. I do indeed," eagerly.

"I think you're the jolliest girl I've ever met, and—and I'm sure we should get on well together—that is if—if you think you could like me a little."

She still remained silent.

"Of course, you don't know much about me," he went on,

quickly, as if to anticipate her objection; "and I don't mind that I'm up to much. I'm an awful duffer for work; I'm only in the third form, but I was captain of the third eleven"—with a subdued air of pride—"and I won the first swimming prize. But I suppose a girl doesn't care about that sort of thing."

"Yes, she does. I do," she said, gravely.

"Well," he said, eagerly, and he took her hand, as he would have taken that of a boy with whom he was anxious to conclude a bargain, "what do you say, Madge? Will you wait till I come back and marry me?"

She hesitated—well, scarcely so much hesitated as reflected—for a moment; then she nodded with girlish gravity.

"Very well," she said.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed, and he flung up the book and laughed. "That's a bargain, then! Here, let us shake hands on it."

She held out her hand, and he took it and wrung it so hard that she winced.

"Oh, I say, I beg your pardon! I've hurt you! I forgot you were only a girl." He turned the hand over and looked at it. "What a little hand you've got! But I suppose all girls have. They're always drawn so in pictures, don't you know—where the knight's kneeling down and kissing the princess's hand. I suppose I ought to kiss yours."

"No, that doesn't matter," she said.

"Oh, all right," he said, easily. "Of course, if you don't want me to—but I think it's the proper thing—"

"No!" she said; and she drew her hand away from his.

As she did so, the bushes parted and Silas Fletcher stood before them. Neither Madge nor Norman started. Why should they have done so? But the latter looked at the intruder with angry surprise.

"Halloo!" he said. "What do you want? Come to fight it out?"

"No, my lord," said Silas, in his thin voice. "The earl wants your lordship."

"Oh, does he?" said Norman. "Well, tell him I'm coming."

Silas Fletcher did not move.

"The earl wants your lordship at once," he said in the same impassive voice.

"Oh, very well."

He got up and nodded to Madge.

"I'll be back directly," he said; and running to the gate, vaulted over and disappeared.

Silas Fletcher stood shuffling the gravel path with the toe of his boot, and rubbing his thin, moist hands behind his back, while he regarded the girl's face covertly.

She picked up the book and appeared to be absorbed in reading for a minute or two; then she looked up.

"Well, Silas Fletcher, what are you waiting for?" she asked, coldly.

He moistened his thin lips.

"I thought you might want to speak to me, Miss Madge," he said, meekly, cringingly.

"Well, I don't," she said, and returned to her book.

But presently, without looking up, she said:

"Who was that who has just gone?"

He eyed her with a sneer.

"Of course you don't know—oh, of course not."

"I don't know!" she said, indignantly. "Who was it?"

"Lord Norman, Viscount Lechmere, the earl's nephew," he said.

She did not seem much impressed; a little, perhaps, but a little only. She was only fifteen, and had not yet learned to worship a title.

"Of course you didn't know!" he repeated, with a more pronounced sneer. And it was wonderful how much more ugly and repellent the sneer made his unprepossessing countenance.

"You wouldn't have sat there talking and reading with him if he hadn't been a lord. You wouldn't talk to and look at books with me—no, because I'm not a swell like Lord Norman."

"No, I wouldn't!" she said, with the sudden passion of a young girl. "I wouldn't, because you're—you're ugly, and I hate you!"

CHAPTER III.

LORD NORMAN ran along the garden-paths and across the lawns toward the principal entrance to the great house. The sun was shining full upon the long-stretching façade of old red stone, and causing the innumerable windows to glitter like so many huge diamonds. The place was palatial in its size and architecture, and a wide terrace stretched along the whole length of the building, against which gleamed at intervals superbly executed marble statuary.

A broad flight of white stone steps lead to the terrace,

flanked on either side by a life-size leopard—the crest of the Chesneys. These heraldic monsters, crouched as if for the spring, seemed, with their half-opened mouths and starting eyes, as if they were waiting to pounce upon the lad; but they made no impression upon him, for he, boy-like, even touched one on the nose as he ran lightly up the steps.

The hall door was open, and he passed in. It was a vast place, which would have been somber but for the sunlight which streamed through the open door, and softened the oaken panels and antique furniture, and gleamed upon the breast-plates of the men in armor, and the gilt frames of the big family portraits.

Lord Norman looked round in search of a servant to announce him, but there was none to be seen, and he stood smoothing his tumbled hair, uncertain what to do or where to go. He was half inclined to suspect that Silas Fletcher had invented the message just to get rid of him, and was thinking of running back to the cottage garden—Madge and “Robinson Crusoe”—when he heard voices proceeding from what he knew was the library, though he had not yet entered it.

He flung himself down on an outer seat near the door of the room, thinking that some one would be sure to come out of it presently, and idly began to examine an old cabinet of ancient arms which stood near him. It was a delightful cabinet full of the most charmingly blood-curdling weapons—swords with hacked edges, clumsy pistols, such as Dick Turpin might have carried, sinister Malay creeses and deadly looking daggers with jeweled handles—and he was so absorbed in these treasures that he had almost forgotten the earl and his message, when some words spoken by the earl's voice itself smote upon his ears, and forced him to listen, whether he would or not.

The earl's voice was never loud, but it was particularly clear—clear and hard, like the fall of a piece of metal on stone—and every word reached Lord Norman as distinctly as if he had been in the room itself.

“Fletcher,” said the voice, “you are, as you always were, a coward. Oh, I do not blame you. You but follow the instincts, display the nature, of your class. One does not look for spirit, courage, in such as you. You can not help it. But you waste your breath when you endeavor to infect me with your craven fears and timid apprehensions. Pshaw, man! do you think that I am likely to turn back now, after all these years? Do you think—you, who should know me if

any man should—that I am likely to swerve from my purpose at the bidding of your croaking? If you do, you deceive yourself. Granted that what you have done, and what I have done—for I am more than content to take the whole responsibility—is a crime. What then?”

There was a pause, and another voice, which Lord Norman recognized as that of Fletcher, the steward, Silas's father, muttered something.

“Pshaw!” retorted the earl, “that is an idle superstition. Crimes are not always discovered. There is no adage so false as the one which always makes your white-livered class quake and tremble. ‘Murder will out!’ Murder very often will *not* out. There are scores of murders, the perpetrators of which have never been discovered. They are not only not hung, but, in all probability, are leading respectable and extremely prosperous and comfortable lives.”

“This was not murder,” Lord Norman heard the steward falter.

“Exactly; and therefore all the less likely to be discovered,” said the earl's metallic voice. “Who is to peach upon us? Who is to discover it? The secret is yours and mine. Only two—”

“You—you don't know that, my lord.”

There was a pause, then the cold voice sounded again.

“You think she may have confided her story to some one before she died? I think not. I knew her better than you did, Mr. Fletcher. You and I are the only two who hold the history in our hands. Mine will not open and disclose it, and yours—”

There was a significant pause.

“You can trust me, my lord,” came the steward's voice.

The earl laughed, an unmirthful, contemptuous laugh. “I know that. You dare not open your lips, even if you wished to. You are a participating criminal—you see, I do not shirk the word—you concurred in the plot which I conceived. I dare say, if justice overtook us—I think that is the kind of phrase in vogue—your punishment would be more severe than mine. I am a peer, you see, and they let us off easily; while *you*—well, you are—nothing, a nobody, and would probably go to penal servitude for as long a term as they could send you.”

The steward muttered something hoarsely, and the earl laughed scornfully, contemptuously.

“Tut, man, you are out of sorts; your nerves are out of order. Why have you become so scrupulous all of a sudden?”

The boy is well enough. He will make a very fair earl. He is strong and handsome enough."

"He is willful and headstrong," said the steward. "I can see that, my lord."

The earl laughed again.

"All the Chesneys are and were," he said, abruptly. "But headstrong as he is, he will find me stronger; strong enough to map out his future for him. He shall not make the mistake I made. I have taken steps to prevent that already. I wrecked my life because I had no one to point out the shoals and rocks in the chart. I will take good care that he does not follow my example. In half an hour I shall have set him upon the course I intend him to sail over, and I will take care he follows no other."

"You mean, my lord—" said the steward.

"I mean— You shall see."

"My lord, take care!" murmured Fletcher. "I can conjecture what you would do; but he is a lad as yet—a mere boy."

The earl broke in with a kind of cold ferocity.

"He is not too young to know my will, and learn that he has to bend to it," he said. "From him I will brook no disobedience. I made him; I can mar him."

Lord Norman had listened up to now in a kind of stupor. But at this point it came home to him that the lad they were talking of was himself; and being an honorable boy, he sprung to his feet, and with a flushed face, pushed open the door and entered the room.

The earl—tall, thin, and gaunt, with shaggy brows over dark and piercing eyes—sat in an elbow-chair by the table, on the other side of which stood Hiram Fletcher, the steward, his long, claw-like hands holding a sheaf of papers.

Fletcher started, and allowed a faint murmur of surprise and consternation to escape his thin lips as the lad entered; but the earl expressed no surprise by word or gesture, but frowned fiercely down at the boy's flushed, handsome face, and regarded him in silence.

It was Lord Norman who first spoke.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said, raising his eyes steadily to the earl's.

"I did," was the response in the hard, metallic tones.

"How long have you been here—in this house?"

Lord Norman reflected for a moment.

"I don't know how long. I was sitting outside in the hall

Fletcher clutched his papers convulsively; but the earl did not move a muscle.

"Outside the room here? Then you have been eaves-dropping—listening?" he said, with icy contempt.

Lord Norman's face grew redder for a moment, then pale.

"No, I haven't," he said, with a kind of indignation. "I couldn't help hearing what you said. The door was open—you spoke distinctly—"

Fletcher gave a kind of groan, and the earl glanced at him with haughty displeasure.

"It is of no consequence," he said, coolly, after a moment or two of reflection; "but for the future remember that when you are listening to the conversation of persons who consider themselves alone, it is your duty to acquaint them with your presence."

"I came in as soon as I knew—or thought—you were talking of me," said Lord Norman, his bright eyes meeting the earl's stern ones unflinchingly.

There was a spell of silence; then the earl said:

"You are right, we were talking of you." Then, without looking at the steward, he said:

"You can go, Fletcher."

Fletcher straightened his bent back, gathered up some papers from the table, and with a singular glance at the lad left the room.

The earl leaned his head upon his hand, and seemed as if he had forgotten the presence of the lad for a time; then, with something like a sigh, he let his hand fall upon the table, and raised his head.

"How old are you?" he asked, suddenly.

"Sixteen, sir."

"Sixteen. At your age I was a man. But they manage things differently nowadays. But you are old enough to understand what I have to say to you. And, first, forget what you have heard just now; it was not intended for your ears; it does not concern you."

"I will try, sir," said Lord Norman, but with a certain hesitation.

"You had better," continued the earl, bringing his heavy brows down over his eyes, so that they looked like two oblong fiery slits. Lord Norman looked at his stern, fierce face calmly, attentively, but without the least sign of fear.

"I sent for you," continued the earl, "because I wish to introduce you to the lady who will be your future wife."

Lord Norman's eyes expanded, and he stared first at the speaker and then round the room.

The earl smiled grimly; or, rather, the sternness of his countenance relaxed slightly.

"You are surprised, I dare say," he said. "It is very likely that you have not thought of marriage." Lord Norman's face flushed as he thought of Madge and the bargain they had just made, but he said nothing. "You are young, even for sixteen, and your life has hitherto been that of a child, a school-boy. I can quite understand that what I have said should startle you; but I wish, I request"—the terrible voice grew sterner, harder, at the words—"that you will try and consider what I am going to say to you; try and realize that, for reasons best known to myself, your future life has been planned out for you. I said for reasons best known to myself. All those reasons I do not intend to tell you. You would not understand most of them. But this one you can understand. Look at me, Norman!"

There was no need for the command, seeing the boy's frank, startled eyes had scarcely left the earl's face; but he, however, gave a slight nod, as if to indicate that he was obeying.

"Do I look a happy man?" demanded the earl.

Lord Norman felt that he ought in politeness to answer in the affirmative, but his innate honesty and something in the face before him compelled him to tell the truth.

"No, sir," he replied.

"You are right," said the earl, gravely. "There is no more wretched man on the face of God's earth."

There was a pause, during which Lord Norman's eyes strayed from the harsh face round the room, with its carved panels of rosewood, its magnificent book-cases, its thick, silken hangings, the rare pictures and precious bric-a-brac, and then to the open window, through which the famous Chesney Park stretched away, as it seemed, into infinity.

The earl watched him, and, as if he were reading the boy's thoughts, said:

"You find that difficult to believe. And you are saying to yourself, 'He is an earl; this house, Chesney Chase, belongs to him. He is rich, has an army of servants, and a host of horses, and carriages to ride in—everything that money can buy; he can't be wretched and unhappy.' Is not that what you were thinking?"

Lord Norman nodded.

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so," said the earl. "And yet, within your heart, as you look at me, you know that what I say is true—that all the money in the world, or all its rank and honor, could not help me. Do you wish to know what it is that has robbed me of the power of enjoying all these good things, and has made me—what you see me? I will tell you, Norman." He hesitated a second, and scanned the lad's face as if to learn whether he understood, then went on slowly, gravely: "When I was a young man, scarcely older than you, I made the one mistake in life which can never be repaired—I made a foolish marriage. I bartered my happiness for a foolish fancy. I thought myself in love, and only discovered my mistake when it was too late to break the chains that bound me. Are you following me? Do you understand?"

Over the boy's frank and open countenance a kind of cloud had gathered, a look of troubled perplexity, as if he were trying to understand and realize what all this meant.

"Yes, I think so," he said, in a low voice.

"Yes, I think you do," said the earl. "At any rate, you comprehend sufficiently to understand why I am anxious to guard you against a similar mistake. I want you to realize that you are not free to waste your life as I have done. Remember that you will be the next earl. All this"—he slightly waved a long, thin hand—"will be yours. All this, and more than you can well imagine. You will be a great man, if you do not ruin your life as I have ruined mine. And I am going to try and prevent that."

There was a pause. The earl looked not at, but through, the boy. The boy stared with a slight frown of trouble and perplexity through the open window. Then the earl, as if awaking from a reverie, went on:

"In less than four years you will be twenty. I intend you to marry then, and the lady whom I have chosen for you. Keep that thought before you. You need say nothing about it to your school-fellows and friends, but bear it in mind. Say to yourself, 'I am not free as other men are; I am pledged. My life is planned out for me by one who is much wiser than I am, by one who has learned, by bitter experience, the pitfalls into which a man may fall—the things which bring ruin and misery.' I don't expect you to be grateful to me—there is no such thing as gratitude—but I expect you, young as you are, to understand that what I am doing is for your good, and yours mainly."

Lord Norman raised his eyes from the open window to the earl's stern face, and his lips opened, as if he were about to

speaking; but before he could utter a word, there came a knock at the door, and a servant entered.

"Lady Delamoor, my lord," he announced in the hushed voice with which servants of Chesney Chase always addressed their master, the great earl.

CHAPTER IV.

THE earl rose from his chair somewhat slowly and stiffly, for the demon gout had got possession of him, and, as he stood upright, one could see that his height was over six feet.

"Wait here until I send for you," he said to Lord Norman. Then, after looking him over with his keen, eager glance, he added: "But you had better brush your hair and change your coat, for the lady of whom I spoke has arrived. When you are ready, return to this room, and I will send for you."

Lord Norman made no response, but still kept his eyes fixed on the stern face, and the earl went out of the room, crossed the hall, and entered the drawing-room, the door of which was opened for him by a couple of tall footmen in rich liveries, who inclined their heads as he passed them, as if they were in the presence of royalty.

The state drawing-room of the Chase was a magnificent apartment, decorated by Inigo Jones, and furnished with the choicest examples of Sherraton and Chippendale. There was an air of subdued splendor, of refined stateliness, which the owners of the most gorgeous of modern rooms sighed enviously over.

The tall windows, with their sentinels of graceful palms, opened on to the terrace, from whence was wafted the perfume of the flowers filling the great room with an atmosphere of roses and pinks, stocks and narcissi.

By one of these windows sat, almost reclined, an extremely beautiful lady—beautiful and young-looking, though her hair was snowy white.

The snow-white hair, quite plentiful and arranged in innumerable curls, was rendered still more striking by delicately penciled black eyebrows.

She was extremely well dressed, and maintained an air of languid hauteur, which fitted her as perfectly as did her bonnet or the gloves on her small, exquisitely shaped hands.

At a little distance from her, in one of the tall gilt chairs, was seated a young girl. She, too, rather lounged than sat, and her attitude and her face, notwithstanding that she was

delicately, ethereally fair, proclaimed her the daughter of the lady.

Lady Delamoor raised her eyes as the earl entered, and languidly extended her hand.

"Well, we are here, Chesney," she said, with a smile of amusement, combined with listless curiosity.

The earl took the hand, and bowed over it, so that his lips almost touched it, then sunk into a chair beside her, glancing as he did so at the girl, who had not moved, but whose pale blue eyes watched him with an affected listlessness which nearly matched her mother's.

"You are always good and gracious," he said; and the metallic voice sounded much softer than it had done a few minutes before in the library.

Lady Delamoor smiled with faint negation.

"Thanks; but I think it was curiosity rather than amiability that brought me here to-day. I said to myself that there must be some very strong object in your asking me to take a drive of twelve miles on such a day as this. Have you any idea how hot it is, how almost unendurable the scorching sunlight?"

As she put the question she leaned back still further, and slowly fanned herself, and the girl also leaned back, and slowly fanned herself.

"Forgive me for causing you so much trouble and inconvenience, Maude; but—yes, my object is an important one."

He glanced significantly at the girl, and added:

"Lady Sybil has not spoken to me yet."

"Sybil has learned enough of good manners to be aware that it is her place to wait until she is spoken to," remarked Lady Delamoor, with a smile.

"Ah! pardon me," said the earl, and he rose and approached the girl and extended his hand.

"You, too, are tired with the long ride," he said. "It was very good of you to come. How can I best thank you? Are you fond of strawberries?"

The girl had risen and bestowed her hand with a kind of courtesy upon him, then sunk into her seat again and regarded him and his question with languidly half-closed eyes.

"Y—es, I think so," she replied, in a voice which was a quaint echo of her mother's.

"Yes? Well, then, let me show you where there are some growing, that you may pick them."

"Thank you," she said; "but I'm afraid they will spoil my gloves."

"Forgive me again," he said, with rather a grim smile. "You see I am not used to young ladies. But come with me, and I will see that you get the strawberries without spoiling your gloves."

She gave him her hand, and he led her down the long room to the window opening to the gardens at the rear of the house, the two making an admirable study, which would have filled Mr. Orchardson, the artist, with rapture.

From the window he called to a gardener who was at work, and who hurried forward with a half-frightened expression on his face.

"Take Lady Sybil to the strawberry-beds, and pick those she points out to you," he said.

He stood for a moment watching the girl, as with a languid stateliness she followed the man, then returned to his seat beside Lady Delamoor.

"She is very pretty," he murmured almost to himself.

"She will be very beautiful. She is like you, Maude."

"Thanks," said Lady Delamoor; "I know that is a sincere compliment, because you don't like children. Why did you ask?"—she laughed—"tell me to bring her? All your requests are framed like demands."

"It is your fault if they are so," said the earl.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It is a matter of taste," she retorted. "I have grown so used to come at your beck and call, to humor your—may I say, whims?"

"You did not humor one of my whims, Maude!" he said, significantly.

She colored faintly, and cast down her eyes, but raised them again after a moment.

"You mean your whim of marrying me?" she said.

"Well, no. But when you asked me, you were a long way off the peerage, and I could not afford to gratify that whim."

"If you could have foreseen how quickly I should become the Earl of Chesney—"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Why, I should have married you, of course!" she said, opening her eyes upon him.

"And spared us both much misery," he said, grimly.

"Yes," she assented, listlessly. "I should not have married Delamoor and been beaten about every fortnight, and you—"

She paused.

"I should not have been driven by devilish pique to—"

—"Marry a dairyman's daughter, or whatever she was. Yes; we are both to be pitied. I suppose she is to be pitied also, or would be deserving of commiseration, if she were not dead. How wretched you both must have been," she added, with a dreamy smile.

The earl's face darkened, and his eyes gleamed.

"You speak lightly of my life's agony," he said. "You can not imagine one tithe of my wretchedness—or hers," he added, sardonically. "But, as you say, she is dead, and we will forget her, or pretend that we do."

"With all my heart," she assented, waving her fan. "How did we come to speak of her? Was it my fault?"

"No; mine," he said, curtly. "I have been thinking of her—of my great mistake, the error—crime, if you will—that has darkened my life. Maude," he went on, abruptly, "do you remember, when last we met, any chance remark of mine respecting your child?"

She thought a moment, then shook her head.

"I can't say I do. I think you spoke mostly of your nephew, Norman. By the way, how fortunate for him that the dairymaid—or whatever she was—did not present you with a son."

"It was," he assented, grimly. "Heaven was merciful; there are no children to remind me of the low-born woman I had, in a moment of madness, made Countess of Chesney."

His face grew black, the thick brows made a penthouse for his eyes as he spoke, and his hands, knotted with gout, clinched spasmodically.

"How you must have hated her!" she murmured, sweetly.

He drew a sharp breath, but affected not to hear her.

"As you say," he said, speaking deliberately and as if he had rehearsed his words, "Norman, my nephew, is my heir; the title, the estates, must come to him. I have no objection. His father was my brother; he married a woman of his own rank. The lad will not discredit the name. I am satisfied. Satisfied with the present, but not satisfied to leave the future of my name to chance. I wish to guard against his making the criminal blunder I perpetrated. If I am spared four years longer—and I have no intention of dying—I intend that he shall marry—marry one of his own class—not a dairymaid, as you call her—one fitted to wear the Chesney coronet, to bear the honored name, which I so nearly dishonored.

"I see," she murmured.

"But do you see," he questioned, fixing his fierce eyes upon her half-closed ones—"do you see that I have sent for

you to propose that your daughter shall be Norman's wife, the future Countess of Chesney?"

Lady Delamoore smiled up at him.

"Of course," she responded, blandly. "I am not an imbecile."

"Good," he said. "And what do you say? Think, Maude! The title might have been yours; if you consent to my proposal it shall be your child's."

She smiled again.

"Am I likely to refuse such an offer for Sybil?" she said. "One of the oldest titles, the richest estates in England. But are we not counting upon our chickens, not before they are hatched, but before they have consented to be counted upon? The boy—"

"I will answer for him," said the earl, quickly. "He is alone in the world, with no one to look to but me. He is wholly dependent—wholly dependent—upon me. Young as he is, he knows that. Young as he is, he also knows that my word is law, and that he must obey. Besides, it is no hard thing to demand of him. He has but to realize that he is bound, pledged rather earlier than most men, that he is not free to—"

—"Marry a milkmaid, like his uncle," put in Lady Delamoore.

The earl winced, and his lips suddenly compressed, but he inclined his head with perfect courtesy and patience.

"Exactly. You have summed up my motive, my intention, in a phrase."

"Have you spoken to him?" she asked. "He is young—"

"I have spoken to him. He is not too young to understand the importance of the arrangement, the importance of obeying me. But what of Sybil?"

Lady Delamoore laughed softly.

"Sybil, thank Heaven, has been well brought up, Chesney. I think that I do not assert too much when I say that she would promise to marry a carpenter and joiner, or—a curate. She will not object to promising herself to Lord Lechmere, the heir to the earldom of Chesney. And though she is much older in years than Norman, she is a girl, and therefore much older in—shall we say, common sense and woman's wisdom. Women think of marriage in their cradles, you know."

"I know," he said, with subdued bitterness.

"She will be delighted at the prospect of a good match."

she were, say, eighteen. Believe me, that long before that age girls have learned to study the marriage market."

He smiled grimly.

"Good," he said.

"Y—es, good so far," she drawled, watching him under her half-closed lids. "But how are you going to insist upon their keeping to the engagement?"

He frowned.

"I will answer for the boy," he said again. "Do you answer for the girl?"

"Do you propose to shut Norman up in a brick tower, and that I should do the same with Sybil?"

"No," he said. "I propose to keep constant watch and ward upon him. It will be difficult, but I will do it. It will be easier for you to do the same with Sybil. She is a girl, and will never be absent from your side. Let it be understood that she is already plighted."

She inclined her head.

"Do not fear that we shall break our part of the contract," she said. "You see," she added, with charming candor, "we have so much to gain."

He smiled grimly.

"Frankly, I do not think you could do better for her. The settlement shall be all you can desire. While I live they shall have an allowance which shall satisfy—even you."

"You are generosity itself," she murmured. There was a pause, then she said: "I think you may call her."

He went to the window, and returned presently, leading the girl by the hand.

"Well, Sybil," drawled Lady Delamoore, "have you enjoyed the strawberries?"

"I eat only one," she replied, listlessly. "The man put them in a leaf which had had a snail on it."

Lady Delamoore laughed softly.

"There must be no creases on Sybil's bed of roses," she said. "Come and sit here. Lord Chesney and I have been talking about you."

Sybil leaned back in her chair, and surveyed a slight stain which the solitary strawberry had made on her finger.

"Why?" she asked, listlessly.

The earl stood, with his hands folded behind his back, looking down at her as if he were reading her face.

"Shall I tell her, or will you?" asked Lady Delamoore.

The earl signed to her to continue.

"Well, my dear Sybil, the earl has been kind enough to make a proposal to me."

"To you?" asked Sybil, lifting her eyes sharply.

Lady Delamoor laughed.

"For you," she said. "Have you ever heard of Lord Norman?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't remember—yes, I think so."

"Yes. He is the earl's nephew; and he proposes that some day—a long way off, a very long way off, ever so many years—you and Lord Norman shall be husband and wife."

There was a pause. Sybil looked from one to the other.

"What is he like?" she asked.

The earl struck in here.

"He is my nephew," he said, as gently as his voice would allow. "He will be the Earl of Chesney, as I am. This place, Chesney Chase, and many other places like it, will soon be his."

"Yes," she said. "He will be very rich?"

"Very," he assented, rather grimly.

"And I shall be the Countess of Chesney?" she asked, looking round.

The earl inclined his head.

"You will be the Countess of Chesney," he said, "when I die; and I am an old man, as you see."

She looked at him calculatingly.

"I should like to be rich," she said. "Mamma is always saying that we are poor."

"Then you do not object?" asked the earl.

She looked at her mother questioningly: "What shall I say, mamma?" She glanced round the magnificent room as she put the question, and the pale-blue eyes grew warmer. She might, indeed, have been eighteen, as the countess had said:

"You shall do as you please," said Lady Delamoor. "I'm afraid you can't be expected to know your own mind, but"—she spoke calmly, impressively—"if I were in your place I should say 'Yes.'"

Sybil raised her eyes to the earl's face.

"Yes," she said. There was a pause, then she added: "I thought it was only princes who were engaged when they were young."

"Sybil has not neglected her history, you see," said Lady Delamoor, with a laugh.

The earl smiled.

"You can imagine yourself a princess, Sybil," he said. "Wait, and I will bring the prince."

He went into the library. Lord Norman had washed his hands and brushed his hair, and exchanged the blue jacket for one of tweed, and was seated on the table swinging his legs to and fro, a thoughtful expression on his face.

"Come with me," said the earl. Lord Norman got off the table and followed him into the drawing-room.

At sight of the lady and the girl, whose eyes were fixed upon him, he stopped short, and a faint flush rose to his face.

"He is handsome!" murmured Lady Delamoor, just loud enough for the earl's ears.

The earl smiled assentingly.

"Norman," he said, "this is Lady Delamoor, an old friend of mine." Norman bowed. "And this is her daughter Sybil. Go and take her hand, for she has consented to be your future wife."

Sybil held out her hand after a moment's pause, and smiled faintly.

Lord Norman went up to her and took her hand and looked at her, and as he looked the flush faded and his face grew pale.

"I am very much obliged," he said, in a low voice; "but I can not marry you."

The girl drew her hand from his grasp and rose to her full height, turning her eyes with startled hauteur from him to her mother, and from her to the earl.

For a moment the earl seemed stricken dumb. Then he laughed—a laugh that was more savage than most men's oaths.

Lady Delamoor leaned forward, startled out of all her languor.

"What does he say?" she asked, in a hushed voice.

The earl grasped Lord Norman by the shoulder.

"Are you mad, boy?" he demanded, hoarsely. "Don't you understand? This is the young lady—"

"I know. I remember, sir," said Lord Norman, with downcast eyes. "It—it is very kind, and—and I am sorry; but I could never marry her."

The earl forced a smile, an awful smile.

"He does not know what he is saying," he said. "The boy is a boor—a clown."

"No," said Lady Delamoor. "He knows what he is saying, and he is not a boor." She burst into a rippling laugh of mockery. "You have made a mistake, Chesney."

Her light scorn seemed to drive the earl mad. His grasp

tightened upon the lad's shoulder, and he whirled him round, facing him.

"You—you—" He struggled for breath. "Boy, have you forgotten where you are, who I am? If you are not the fool I am trying to believe you to be, you know the meaning of the words you have spoken."

"I know," said Lord Norman, in a low voice, but a perfectly firm one.

"You cur!" snarled the earl. "Perhaps you know, too, that you are a beggar, a pauper, a dog that lives upon my charity. Do you understand that? You do? But there is something more that you do not know, and that is this: if I choose, you shall remain a beggar and a pauper for the rest of your life. A word from me—"

He seemed to feel rather than see the eyes of the two females fixed upon him curiously, and with a great effort pulled himself up.

"Enough!" he said, hoarsely. "Out of my sight!"

As he spoke, he thrust the boy from him, and, while so thrusting him, struck him savagely across the face.

Lord Norman reeled, but saved himself from falling by clutching at a chair.

For a moment he stood, white and panting, and pushing the hair from his forehead; then, with a steady look at the earl, he turned and left the room.

As he did so he glanced, by chance, at the fair-haired girl. She had not moved from her seat, had not uttered a cry; and as he looked at her, he saw a smile of infinite satisfaction, of girlish malice, upon the pretty, delicately cut face—a look that cut him like a whip.

CHAPTER V.

LORD NORMAN went out into the hall and down the steps. There was a stinging, aching pain across his face, but a far worse pain about his heart.

The Chesneys and the Lechmeres—and he belonged to both these high families—were bad at taking blows. As a rule, they gave them back, and with interest—plenty of interest. But Lord Norman, seeing that he could scarcely return the blow, had to bear it.

For a time he felt stunned and bewildered by the furious indignation which raged within him. He had been struck in the presence of ladies, and undeservedly struck. This was bad, but worse remained behind.

Tingling in his ears, as the blow tingled on his cheek, were the words the earl had spoken. He had called Norman "a pauper and a beggar," and had declared that if he, the earl, so pleased, Norman should remain a beggar and a pauper for the rest of his life.

The lad had not the least idea of the meaning or the worth of the threat, but it stung and lashed him until the tears of rage and humiliation smarted in his eyes.

His father and mother were dead. He was alone in the world, save for this uncle, the powerful earl, and was virtually dependent upon him. It was true, he thought, that he was a pauper; but, at any rate, he would not be a beggar.

As he looked at the great red house, he resolved that he would never enter it again while the earl lived; that he would never accept another penny from him, or eat another morsel of food that came from his hands. Some day the place would be his, but, until that day, he would never cross its threshold.

As he looked at the house, he was reminded of the lady and the girl, and if the aching and smarting on his cheek had not stung him into the resolution, the remembrance of the smile, the sneer on Sybil Delamoor's face, would have done so. He could see them, feel them, upon him now.

He sat for some time—how long he never knew—dwelling upon his humiliation, and strengthening his resolve, and the evening was growing into the dusk of an early summer night, waiting for its moon, when he rose from the stone bench.

He felt in his pockets, and examined their contents. They were numerous, and from the miscellaneous collection he picked out what money he had.

There was a sovereign, six shillings, and some coppers, and, slowly mounting the steps, he flung them on the great mat inside the door, where, the next morning, they were discovered and appropriated, with equal surprise and delight, by the hall-porter.

The lad would have liked to have taken the clothes off his back and flung those also over the threshold of Chesney Chase; but that, he felt, was scarcely practicable. With his pockets lightened and his wounded spirits somewhat soothed, he went across the lawn and entered the cottage garden. As he did so, the two dogs in the stable recognized the step of their newly made friend and yapped entreatingly, and Lord Norman waved his hand toward them.

"Good-bye, Carl, old boy; good-bye, Tozer. I'm afraid you won't see me any more."

All was very still as he entered the small garden, and he

looked round uncertainly. He had come to say good-bye to his promised wife, Madge Gordon, but he did not know where to find her or how to apprise her of his presence. He flung himself down on the seat where he and she had sat so happily only a few hours ago, and pondered. The moon rose, and, as if she had been waiting for it, as well as he, Madge's small, brown hand opened the lattice window and Madge's face looked out.

Lord Norman's heart gave a bound of joy and satisfaction, and he ran to the window.

"Madge! Madge!" he whispered.

She started and looked down at him, and, in the first moment of her surprise, was about to shut the window again.

"Don't!" he pleaded. "I want to speak to you. Don't shut the window."

"What do you want to say?" she asked, after a moment's pause. "Can't you come and say it in the morning?"

"No," he said; "I sha'n't be here then. I shall be far away."

"But I am up at six o'clock," she said, leaning her elbows on the window-sill, her face in her hands.

"Yes; but I am going to-night—now!" he said, in an earnest whisper.

She looked beyond him.

"Now—this minute? Where is the carriage? I don't see it."

"There isn't any carriage. I'm going to walk. Madge, I want to tell you all about it, but I'm afraid some one will hear me and find me."

He ran his eye up the wall. There were the remains of an old lattice round which a Devonsiensis rose had climbed until it had grown thicker and stronger than the lattice itself. He swarmed up this, lightly as a cat or a monkey, until he could rest his arm on the window-sill.

"You'll fall," she said, with a little catch in her breath.

"Not a bit of it. I could hang on here for hours, and the stuff is strong enough to hold an elephant."

"Grandfather will be very angry if you break it down," she said.

"All right; I sha'n't hurt it. Madge, I've come to say good-bye—"

"You could have said that down there," she interpolated, thinking dreamily at the moment how strong he was, and how easily he had got up to her.

"No, I couldn't; not so well. Madge, I'm going away to-night, and—and I may be away a long time."

As he spoke, she looked at him attentively. There was a ring, an earnestness in his voice which she had not heard before. It seemed to her—child though she was—as if he had grown older, ever so much older than herself; whereas, it was she who only a few hours ago had seemed the elder.

"Where are you going?" she asked, in a voice as low as his own.

"I don't know," he answered. "I haven't quite made up my mind."

"Aren't you going back to school, college, wherever it is?"

"No," he said; "I'm not going to school any more. I'm going to begin life. I'm going on my own hook—I mean all by myself."

"I don't understand what you mean," she said, wonderingly.

"Well, look here, Madge," he said, "I've had a row with my uncle, the earl. We have quarreled."

"Quarreled! Why, what did you quarrel about?"

His eyes, which had been fixed on her face, dropped.

"Never mind; it doesn't matter," he said, evasively.

"Oh, don't tell me if you don't like," she said, with that sudden, exasperating coldness with which a woman resents the balking of her curiosity.

"Don't be angry, Madge," he said. "It—it was about a girl."

"A girl?" Her eyes opened upon him.

"Yes," he said, shamefacedly. "They—the earl and her mother—wanted me to promise to marry her, and—I couldn't do that."

"Why not?" she demanded, looking straight before her.

He raised his eyes to her face reproachfully.

"Madge!" he exclaimed, in a low voice, "have you forgotten already? How could I promise to marry her when I've already promised you?"

"Oh, but I'd have let you off," she said, but without looking at him.

Without a word he began to climb down. It was the best thing he could have done. Out went her white arm, and her brown paw seized his shoulder.

"No, no; I didn't mean that—not if you don't want me to give you up. Stay; I want to know more." He came up to his old perch. "Was she pretty?"

He thought a moment.

"I don't know. Yes, I suppose so."

Her grasp relaxed.

"Oh! Prettier than I am?"

"No," he said, promptly; "not nearly so pretty. She was fair and pale, with what-do-you-call-it eyes. I don't like girls with that colored hair and eyes."

She smiled slowly at him.

"And you said you would not marry her?"

"Yes; and—and then there was a row; the earl flared up, and—and said things, and I came away. I'm not going back—never! I'm going to earn my own living. And what I wanted to say to you, Madge, was—"

The moon sailed up above the sycamores and shot a placid ray full upon both Romeo and Juliet.

Madge started and looked at him.

"What's—what's that on your face?" she asked, with a catch in her voice.

The blood rushed to the face, and he looked down ashamedly.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said, in a low voice, and with a poor attempt at a smile.

"Nothing! Why, it's a bruise! I can see it quite plainly. Tell me what it is at once."

"The earl—" he stammered, overwhelmed by a brave lad's shame and humiliation.

"He struck you!" she exclaimed, in a whisper that hissed through her clinched teeth.

"Oh, that's all right," he said; "never mind that. What I've come to say—"

She stretched out one hand, and gently—gently as the fall of thistle-down—laid it on the boy's burning cheek.

"How hot it is! The brute!" she murmured.

He put up his hand to take hers down.

"No," she said; "it hides it, and I don't like to see it; it makes me feel bad and wicked. Go on."

Her touch confused him; he looked round vaguely for a moment.

"Oh! this was it. I came to remind you of our bargain, Madge, and—and—to give you the chance of backing out if you like."

"Thank you. What made you think I should want to back out?"

"Well—" He hesitated. "You see, I didn't know whether you'd care to be bound to a fellow when he is in disgrace. I'm only a kind of tramp now. I sha'n't blame you

if you cry off. You see, it isn't as if you'd known me a long while and got used to the idea of marrying me."

Her hand dropped.

"Do you want me to cry off?" she asked, ingenuously. "Perhaps you'd like to cry off yourself."

"No, no," he asserted, earnestly. "I don't want to; I swear I don't! But I oughtn't to hold you to it unless you like, after what's happened."

"I see," she said thoughtfully. "Well, I do like."

A flush of delight flew over his face.

"Madge, you're a brick!" he said. "That's all I wanted to know. I'll go now. Don't you be afraid that I shall ever forget or want to be off my bargain. I'll come back to you, I swear I will, when I'm a man and I've made my fortune, and we'll be married."

His whisper rang with youth's hope and confidence, and from under her lashes she stole a swift, admiring glance at him.

"And how are you going to make your fortune?" she asked.

This gave him pause, as Hamlet remarks.

"Well, I don't quite know yet," he said, but not at all despondently; as if the ways of fortune-making were so numerous as to make selection difficult. "I haven't thought it out quite. I'm strong, and I can do all sorts of things, and—oh, I shall see;" and his frank, handsome eyes smiled up at her.

There was a pause, then he said:

"If I were you, Madge, I shouldn't say anything about our bargain. I sha'n't."

"Very well," she acquiesced.

"And don't say you've seen me. I don't suppose any one will ask you. And—and I'm afraid I must go now," he added; but he still lingered.

"You must be tired hanging on there like a monkey or a bat," she said.

"No, not a bit. I could stay here all night if you'd stay and talk. But I must go. They might send after me and try and bring me back. Not that I'd go. I'd sooner die." Another pause. "Madge, I'd like to give you a keepsake; a kind of what d'ye call it—token, souvenir, just so that you could look at it now and then, and so not forget me." He fished in his pocket and produced from that portable chandler's shop a penknife with many blades, some broken. "Just catch hold of that, will you?" he said. "I'm sorry it isn't something newer and prettier; but you'll find it useful for

cutting roses and things. Two of the blades are broken; Smith Minor broke them last term; but the big one is all right, and it's pretty sharp. Mind you don't cut yourself."

"I'll mind," she said, as she looked at the weapon. "But isn't it unlucky to give me a knife?"

"Oh, yes, so it is. Oh, but it's all right if the other fellow gives you something. You must give me something, Madge. Oh, I forgot, I've got something of yours already. Your handkerchief, don't you know?"

"My handkerchief? Yes, I remember." She held out her hand and he began to fumble in his pocket with his disengaged hand, then he stopped suddenly.

"I should like to keep it, Madge, if you don't mind?" he said, simply.

"But that's nothing; you'll lose it."

"No, I sha'n't," he said.

"Isn't there anything else I can give you?" she asked.

He pondered for a moment, his eyes on her face, then he said:

"I suppose you couldn't give me a bit of your hair, just a little bit?"

"I could," she said; but she hesitated. Then she opened the knife. "Cut as much as you want," she said, holding down her head.

"I can't," he said, ruefully; "I've only got one hand."

She left the window and returned with a pair of scissors.

"You can cut it with these," she said.

"I'll try," he said. "I won't cut much. I say, what beautiful hair you've got, and such a lot! You won't miss that little bit, will you?"

She shook her head.

"No," she said.

He dexterously cut and caught the small lock of soft black hair in the palm of his hand.

"There's an envelope in my breast pocket," he said. "If you'll take it out you can put the hair in it."

She dived into the pocket and got the envelope and inclosed the lock.

"Thanks," he said. "Just put it in my waistcoat pocket, please. Put it in safely; I shouldn't like to lose it."

She obeyed with innocent gravity.

"You'll lose it in a week," she said.

"Oh, no, I sha'n't," he retorted. "You'll see; and now I must go. Good-bye, Madge."

She leaned over and looked down at his moonlit face.

-- Can you come an inch or two higher?"

He raised himself so that his face was nearly level with hers, and softly, swiftly, as a bird skims over the sea, she stooped down and touched his bruised cheek with her lips.

"Good-bye," she murmured.

Before he could recover from the strange thrill, the delighted astonishment, she had withdrawn her head and closed the window.

But as he began to descend, the window opened slightly, and the wonderful eyes looked down upon him.

"Good-bye," she murmured again; "and don't forget!"

CHAPTER VI.

LORD NORMAN gained the high-road and walked quickly away from Chesney Chase, keeping to the shadowed side of the road, and now and again stopping to look behind him and listen.

It was a lovely night, full of sweet scents and sounds, for the nightingales sung to cheer him on his way.

He felt very lonely and a little sad; but he kept his heart up, and walked with his handsome head erect. He was his own master now, and he kept telling himself that he had to make his fortune as soon as possible, and return to marry Madge Gordon. It was true that he would be the earl and owner of Chesney Chase some day, when his uncle died; but he would not wait for that. His uncle might live for years—ten, twenty, thirty, perhaps—and Lord Norman had no desire for his uncle's death. No; he would make his own fortune, and be independent of everybody, the earl included. No one should have the right to call him a pauper.

As to the mode of making his fortune he was not quite decided. He recalled all the stories of lads who had run away from home and become millionaires, but none of them seemed to fit his own case exactly. They had generally been sons of working people, and had invariably carried their wardrobe in a red pocket-handkerchief, and half a crown in their pockets. Lord Norman was poorer than any of these heroes, for he had no wardrobe save that which he carried on his back, and he had left his last penny on the mat at Chesney Chase.

The road ran tolerably straight for some miles, then it split into a fork, with a finger-post pointing down each road. Lord Norman looked up at it, and decided to take the road to the left, which, the finger-post declared, led to Dexmouth. The

name sounded like that of a town, and perhaps he could find some work there.

He trudged on briskly, and presently climbed a high hill. When he arrived at the top he was surprised to see the sea lying below him, a sheet of steel-blue water rippling sleepily in the moonlight. It was so beautiful, so peaceful that Lord Norman sat down upon a bank to take a short rest. Somehow or other the sea reminded him of Madge. He took out the envelope containing the wisp of hair, and looked at it thoughtfully, recalling their parting. No, he would never marry any one else—never!

As he was putting the envelope back into his waistcoat pocket he heard a strange noise near him. It sounded like a snore, and Lord Norman sprang to his feet and looked round, and was rather startled as a human form rose from the ground immediately behind him and stood silently regarding him.

The apparition was a lad about Lord Norman's size, and, as Lord Norman noticed, was dressed like a sailor.

The silence was so prolonged as to be unbearable, and Lord Norman broke it with the school-boy greeting:

"Halloo!"

"Halloo!" responded the other boy. "What are you doing here?"

"Resting," replied Lord Norman, with some dignity.

"What are you doing?"

"Dossing," said the boy.

"Doss—?"

"Sleeping," he explained. As he spoke he looked around cautiously, and then, with a yawn, inquired: "I say, can you tell me which is the nearest way to London?"

Lord Norman thought for a moment.

"That," he said, pointing in the direction from which he had come. "You'll get to the London road at the bottom of this one. It's a long way. Are you going to walk?"

"I suppose so," he said. "Perhaps—I shall see." He yawned again, and took out his pipe and lighted it. "Have a smoke?" he asked.

Lord Norman declined.

"You're a sailor, I suppose?" he said, looking at the other lad's clothes.

The boy glanced at him suspiciously.

"No, I ain't—if you mean because of my togs. They ain't mine; they're my brother's. I put them on just for a lark—and I wish I hadn't."

"Why? Don't you like them?" asked Lord Norman, who had thought the blue trousers, and serge jacket open at the throat, with its spotted blue scarf, particularly cool and jolly.

The boy shook his head.

"No; I hate 'em. You don't happen to have anything to eat in your pocket, do you?" he added, with feigned carelessness.

"No, I haven't," said Lord Norman, rather ruefully, for he himself was beginning to feel hungry.

"Oh, it's of no consequence!" said the boy, nonchalantly.

He flung himself down on the bank, and smoked with evident enjoyment, though every now and then he took the pipe from his mouth and seemed to listen.

"Where are you going, mate?" he asked.

Lord Norman did not quite like being called "mate," but answered promptly enough:

"To Dexmouth."

"Oh," said the boy, shortly. "Lookin' for work, I expect?"

Lord Norman nodded "Yes."

"What's your line?"

Lord Norman thought for a moment.

"I'm not particular," he said.

The boy grinned.

"Then you'll be easily satisfied," he said. "You don't look as if you'd done much work," he added, scanning Lord Norman's figure and his thin, white hands keenly.

Lord Norman colored.

"Not—very much," he said. "I must be going now. Good-night."

"Good-night," said the boy. "It's pretty near mornin' now, though. It'll be dark presently, thank goodness."

"Why do you want it to be dark?" Lord Norman could not help asking.

"Oh, nothing—only fancy!" replied the boy, evasively; then, as Lord Norman was going, he said: "You like these togs of mine, don't you?"

"They're not bad," said Lord Norman, eying them gravely, but with a covert favor which the boy's sharp eyes detected.

"Look here," he said; "I'll swap 'em for yours, if you like. Mind, I don't particular want to, but if you fancy 'em—"

Lord Norman shook his head. The idea, at the first shock, did not please him.

"You think you'd have the worst of the bargain?" said the boy. "You think they're not as good as yours? Well, p'raps they ain't. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a bob in."

While the boy had been making the offer, it had occurred to Lord Norman that if the exchange were made, it would help him to escape. In any hue and cry that the earl might make after him, he would, of course, be described as wearing the clothes in which he had left the Chase.

"Well—not enough?" said the boy, as Lord Norman pondered. "Well, say two bob? Mind, I'm not going to advance on that. Take it, or leave it."

"Very well," said Lord Norman.

The boy looked immensely relieved, whipped off his jacket and trousers, and Lord Norman followed his example; but before doing so, he carefully emptied his pockets, and held Madge's handkerchief and the lock of hair tightly in his hand.

In a very few moments the exchange was made, and the two lads were transformed.

The boy handed the two shillings to Lord Norman, and looked down at his newly acquired clothes with a grin of satisfaction.

"What a Juggins you must be," he said. "This 'ere suit is worth three times, four times, as much as them. Why, you can buy 'em in any of the ports for a suvreign, and these swell togs of yours must have cost pounds. They're nearly new, too."

Lord Norman looked at him gravely.

"I'm satisfied if you are," he said. "Good-night," and he turned to go; but the boy called out to him cautiously:

"I say, if—if any one should ask you if you've seen me, you can say 'no;' or, rather, you can say 'yes,' and that I'm on my way to Portsmouth. See?"

Lord Norman did not deign to reply, but walked on, and presently a stone whizzed past his head.

Now, Lord Norman could stand being cheated, but this was a little too much. He caught up a stone, took careful aim, and fired, and felt a glow of satisfaction as a howl of pain and rage informed him that his shot had hit the mark.

As the boy had said, it was nearly morning by this time, and the moon had dropped down and left the heavens dark.

Down below him in the hollow he could see the lights of the town twinkling in the gloom, and he quickened his pace. He was very hungry and wanted his breakfast; but the feeling was by no means unpleasant or troublesome now, for he had

a large capital of two shillings, and he was wondering how soon the shops would be open, and what would be the cheapest and most satisfying thing he could buy; hesitating between a bun and a glass of milk, or some chocolate and lemonade, when two men sprung out of a narrow lane, and seizing him by the arms, proceeded to swear and bang him about the head.

Lord Norman struggled and fought with all his might, but only succeeded in making his captors furious and their language more sultry.

"Stow it, d'ye hear, you young devil!" exclaimed one, in a rough, but not altogether ill-humored voice. "What's the use of struggling and kicking like a young wild-cat. You've got to come back, and you know it. Ah, would you!" for Lord Norman, who had learned to box and had been the hero in several tremendous school battles, struck out and landed a successful blow on the man's head.

"Why, you young varmint, you deserve the rope, and, by George, you'll get it when we get you aboard!"

"He won't have to wait till then, Bill," grunted the other man, beginning to take off his belt.

"No, no," said the first, laughing. "Don't beat him. There's no time. Let's get him aboard. We're late as it is, and the tide's turned. Now, look here, young 'un," he continued, addressing Lord Norman, who stood quiet, but on the defensive, "d'ye mean to come along quiet and peaceable, or d'ye want him to give you a lathering afore we start? You've got to go, you know, anyway, for it stands to reason a mere whipper-snapper like you can't beat a couple of full-grown men like me and Jem."

This seemed very sound logic to Lord Norman, and he dropped his fists.

"All right," he said.

"Right you are," said Bill. "Just tuck your arm in mine. Now we're right and comfortable."

Lord Norman walked between his captors in silence. As they passed a street-lamp he could see by its murky light that they were sailors, and he knew that they had mistaken him for the boy with whom he had exchanged clothes.

He was on the verge of pointing out their error, when it occurred to him that if he did so, some awkward questions would be asked, his own identity discovered, and himself returned to Chesney Chase; so that he deemed it best to keep silence.

Besides, there was a touch of romance in the adventure which appealed to Lord Norman's boyish nature. The

sailors, leaving the town on the right, led him down a more roughly paved alley to the water's edge, where a boat was moored.

"Tumble in," said Bill, with good-natured presumption, "and don't let us have any more of your larks. You can't be ashamed of yourself, running away from such a craft as the 'Nautilus,' where we've all been like a father to you."

"Ungrateful young varmint," growled the other. "If I wasn't so short-handed I'd chuck him overboard."

"Let him be," laughed Bill. "He ain't the first you 'un as has cut and run. Lord, I've done it myself two or three times before I was his age. Pull away; the tide's swinging out, and the skipper will be on the fret."

Instinctively Lord Norman took the tiller—he had to steer and rowed in the school-boat, and could do both as well—and Bill nodded approvingly.

"Coming to your senses, eh, young 'un? That's right. Now you look here: just promise to behave yourself on your voyage, and I won't split on you. You know what you'll get if I do."

Lord Norman nodded, and the sailor, taking the nod as sign of acquiescence, nodded in response.

They pulled on, Lord Norman steering for the only way he could see lying at anchor, and presently they reached her.

"Tumble up," said Bill, in a whisper.

Without a word, Lord Norman caught a rope hanging from the vessel's side and scrambled on board.

The captain, who was pacing the deck impatiently, stopped in front of him for a moment, growled something, and resumed his pacing.

Lord Norman was wondering what he had said, when the man Bill gripped him by the shoulder and shook him.

"Here, wake up, young 'un!" he said. "Didn't you hear? You're to take the lantern off. Here you are!" and he caught up a ship's light.

As Lord Norman stretched out his hand to take it, the light fell upon his face. The sailor started back with an exclamation of astonishment, and nearly dropped the light.

"Why, what the devil—! What's this? Who on earth are you?"

Lord Norman smiled. Notwithstanding the predicament in which he stood, his sense of humor was tickled.

The sailor held the light in front of Lord Norman's face, and shook him again.

Before Lord Norman could reply, the captain came abreast of them again.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, sternly. "Get that anchor up. Now, boy, take that light aft."

The sailor responded, "Ay, ay, sir!" and whispering, "Keep your mouth shut!" thrust the lantern into his hand and pushed him in front of him.

A few moments afterward the men were singing as they worked the capstan, the cable was groaning, the anchor was being weighed, and the good ship "Nautilus," with all her sails set, was sailing merrily before the wind, bound for Sydney.

Lord Norman stood against the bulwarks, out of the way of the men, half dazed by the bustle and confusion; and presently, when these had somewhat subsided, the sailor called Bill came up to him. The captain was with him.

"Now, then, young 'un," he said, in an undertone, "just tell the captain how you came to play this 'ere joke upon us."

Lord Norman remained silent, and the captain, taking the lantern, held it to the lad's face.

"The boy's a young gentleman!" he exclaimed, with an oath. "Here, young sir, who are you, and where do you come from, and how did you come here?"

Lord Norman had been preparing himself for some such questions.

"My name is Harry Richmond," he said, quietly and fearlessly. "I've run away from home—"

"The devil!" exclaimed the captain. "Do you know that you are a stowaway, and that I can put you in irons, young sir, and keep you there, too!"

"A stowaway?" said Lord Norman. "No, I'm not. Your men brought me here."

The captain turned inquiringly to the sailor.

"That's right enough, cap'n," Bill admitted. "We took him for that young varmint of a Jack as give us the slip directly we got ashore. You see, he's got sea clothes on, and he's about the same height—"

The captain swore impatiently under his breath.

"Well, he's here, anyway, and I'm not going to put back for him. Take him to the fo'castle. And look here, my lad," he called after Lord Norman, "now you're here, you'll have to work; we're short-handed, and I can't afford to have any slouches on board my ship."

"All right, sir," said Lord Norman, cheerfully, as he followed the sailor.

"It is beautiful," he said. "You look like a white godetia."

She laughed and blushed a little. "I'm glad you think I look nice, grandfather, because I made the dress myself. It's only nuns' veiling at eightpence halfpenny a yard, and it will look very insignificant beside all the rich dresses of the great folks, but I'm quite satisfied with it if you are. I shouldn't like to disgrace you, grandfather."

He smiled at her, and shook his head, and sinking into the chair again, began in an absent kind of way to feel for the two specimens.

"Oh, no you don't!" said Madge, putting them beyond his reach, and taking his arm. "Come along; the fly must be here in another minute, and we don't want to be late. I shouldn't like to miss a minute. This is my first ball, you know. Grandfather, do you remember how you felt at your first ball?"

"I can't say I do, my dear," he replied, absently, as she pushed him gently down the stairs. "Very uncomfortable, I dare say; and I feel uncomfortable still. Dancing is a dreadful waste of time. I might have classified those specimens, and written up the seed-list to-night," he added, with a sigh.

"Well, instead, you can classify all the various human flowers we shall see to-night," she said. "And there will be some very radiant ones, will there not? Everybody, gentle and simple, goes to the Chesney Harvest Ball, don't they?"

He nodded.

"Yes," she went on, "all the county people—all the grand people one sees in their carriages—will be there, mixing with us humble folks—the rare porcelain with the common clay."

"There is not much mixing," he said, with a smile. "A thick red cord is drawn across the room dividing the clay from the porcelain."

"I see," she said, archly. "The porcelain is so afraid of being broken."

He chuckled dryly.

"I wonder what the rich and titled folk will do when they get to heaven. Will there be a silk cord there, grandfather?"

He looked at her rather curiously in his preoccupied way. Two or three times a day—sometimes in an hour—some speech of hers startled and bewildered him, for he had not yet realized that she had grown into a woman, and a woman full of cleverness and wit.

They reached the porch, and Madge looked out for the fly. As she did so, her eyes fell upon the garden seat. The seat on

To-night, for the stars were shining, and a harvest moon was idly mounting in the sky, she was dressed all in white; in some soft stuff that draped her graceful figure as happily as the Grecian robe draped the fair limbs of Galatea when Pygmalion called her into life; and as she put on a pair of cream-colored gloves, she looked expectantly first toward the gate and then up the stairs of the cottage.

"Aren't you ready, grandfather?" she called in the same low voice that had throbbed Lord Norman's boyish heart, but rich with an added tone of indescribable music. "Grandfather!"

A door opened on the landing, and Mr. Gordon looked down at her. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and had a book and some flowers in his hand, and his face expressed bewilderment and some perturbation.

"I—I beg your pardon, my dear," he said.

"Oh, how wicked!" she exclaimed, with a laugh. "You have forgotten all about the ball. And I might have stood here until to-morrow morning!"

"I'm—I'm afraid you might," he admitted, penitently. "I'm very sorry; the fact is, I found these two specimens on my table—"

"—And at once forgot all about the ball, and sat down to study them, and in the middle of your dressing, too! Grandfather, you are too bad."

She ran up the stairs, laughing softly, and pushing him into the room, planted him in a chair, and, seizing the brushes, began to do his hair. The old gentleman offered no resistance—not even when she took the precious specimens from his hand, and insinuated an old-fashioned dress-coat upon him.

"Now stand up and let me put one of these flowers into your button-hole."

"No, no," he said, hastily, rescuing them; "they are exceedingly rare."

"So is my patience," she said, smiling. "But never mind, I'll pick you a rose as we go out. How nice you look! Now, don't you think you do?"

She took him by the shoulders, and turned him to the glass.

But the old man looked beyond his own reflection to hers.

"Dear me," he said, with dreamy surprise. "How—how gorgeous you look, Madge! You are quite a woman!"

"I should think so," she retorted. "If one isn't a woman at nearly twenty, when is one likely to be? And you like my dress?"

He nodded emphatically.

to the entrance at last, and they got out and passed up the crimson-lined stairs and into the hall.

Madge looked round with the unconcealed interest of youth. The large room, dingy enough on ordinary days, had been transformed into a fairy bower. The whitewashed walls were covered with evergreens and draped with pink art muslin. Flags hung from the timbered roof, and the gayly dressed throng was reflected in Venetian mirrors hired from London. The floors had been planed and polished, and a Hungarian band was playing a dreamy waltz, which set Madge's little feet moving softly.

This was her first ball, her first glimpse of the great world beyond the cottage garden, and little wonder if her heart beat and her eyes sparkled.

Her grandfather, who was always confused and bewildered and absent-minded when outside his garden, had led her into a corner, where they were hemmed in by a portion of the crowd; but Madge was quite contented to stop there—for a time, at any rate.

"Tell me who some of them are?" she whispered, standing on tiptoe, though there was no need, for she had grown tall. "For instance, who are those who have just come in?"

He peered through his eyeglasses.

"Lord and Lady Ferndale," he said.

"How pretty she looks with her white hair," Madge murmured. "It is a sweet face."

"She is a very sweet woman," he said, absently.

"You know her, grandfather?"

"Yes, a little. I know Lord Ferndale better. I have met him at the Royal Society. But that's years ago," he added, hastily.

Madge laughed softly.

"You ought to be among the great folk yourself," she said, archly.

He shook his head.

"I am only the head gardener of Chesney Chase," he said, with a smile, "and should not be here only that everybody is here—tenants, townspeople, everybody."

"Who is that tall man with the big mustache?" she asked.

He looked round, following the direction of her bright eyes.

"Lord Rochester; 'the first gentleman in Europe' they call him. That is Lady Landon beside him. Lord Landon is talking to the mayor."

As he spoke, a tall, fair lady entered with an equally tall,

"Who are they?" asked Madge.

"Lady Delamoor and her daughter Sybil," said Mr. Gordon.

"She is very beautiful—lovely!" Madge murmured, gazing at her with the admiration one beautiful woman feels for another—of a different style. "They are going to dance; let us sit down."

Mr. Gordon looked round for a chair, and as he found one and gave it to her, Mr. Fletcher passed them. The five years had left the mark of ten upon his face and form, and his thin, hatchet face, lined by a thousand wrinkles, looked fearfully out of place in such a scene.

As he moved along slowly, looking sideways out of his hollow eyes, he caught sight of Mr. Gordon, and, stopping, glanced keenly from him to Madge.

"Good-evening!" he said, in his sharp, thin voice. "So you are here, eh?"

"Yes," said the old man—"yes, Mr. Fletcher."

The steward stared at Madge, muttered something unintelligible, and passed on.

"The earl is coming, or he would not be here," remarked Mr. Gordon, absently.

"Why?" asked Madge.

"He never leaves the earl," replied the old man, simply. "Do you want to dance, my dear? I am afraid you won't get many partners."

"I do not mind," she said, contentedly. "It is quite enjoyment enough to look on. I don't see the red cord, grandfather."

"Not yet," he said. "They will not draw it across until the crowd gets greater, and the dancing more—more wild."

"I see," she said, with a smile. And she leaned back, with her hands clasped, and looked on at the gay scene, quite content, as she had said, to be a spectator. She watched the dancers, the couples promenading round the room, her feet softly beating time to the music of the band. Presently she became conscious that one girl stood out, as it were, from the throng, and received most attention.

It was the girl with the delicately fair face—Lady Delamoor's daughter, Sybil.

It seemed to Madge that she had already become the belle of the ball.

Madge looked at her admiringly, and yet with a certain reservation in her admiration. The face was lovely enough, the eyes blue as a forget-me-not, and yet—and yet there was

something in the face that jarred on Madge; a certain coldness, an expression of pride and hauteur which detracted from its fair loveliness.

She was startled from her reverie by a voice:

"Will you give me this dance, Miss Gordon?"

She looked up and saw the son of one of the largest of the tenant farmers standing beside her. He was a good-looking young fellow, most awfully in love with her; he went to church every Sunday that he might gaze at her face.

She rose and took his arm, and they joined the dancers.

To some girls—one might almost write most girls—dancing comes naturally. Madge had received a few, half a dozen or more, lessons, and had picked up the new waltz, and—having a good memory and a keen ear—the square dances perfectly.

Before they had completed the third circuit of the room people were looking at her and asking questions. With those wonderful eyes of hers and the pure oval face, it was impossible for Madge to pass unnoticed even in such a crowd as this. Quite unconscious, she gave herself up to the waltz, seeing nothing, hearing nothing but the soft, bewitching music.

Her grandfather looked on with an absent-minded smile, and started mildly when a hand was put on his shoulder and a voice said:

"How do you do, Gordon?"

The old man dropped his eyeglasses, found and replaced them, and looked up at the speaker.

"How do you do, Lord Ferndale?" he said.

Lord Ferndale smiled down at him.

"This is the last place in which I should have expected to meet you," he said.

The old man smiled.

"I am here in charge of my granddaughter," he explained.

"Or she is in charge of you?" retorted Lord Ferndale, laughing. "How is that book on the three-petaled flower getting on, Gordon?"

The old man sighed and shook his head.

"It is a large subject, my lord," he replied. "Very large."

He had been at work on it for a score of years.

Lord Ferndale nodded sympathetically.

"You are quite right not to hurry," he said. Then, after a pause, he went on: "What a gay scene! You, who love bright colors in flowers, must enjoy it. What a lovely girl

"That girl with the dark hair and blue eyes; the one in the white dress, with the dark-red rose in her hair."

Mr. Gordon peered through his glasses.

"I think you must mean my granddaughter, Madge, my lord," he said, simply.

"Your granddaughter!" said Lord Ferndale. "I congratulate you, Gordon. She is the most beautiful girl in the room."

The old man blinked at him.

"She is a very good girl," he said, inconsequently.

Almost as he spoke, the waltz finished, and Madge and her partner came up.

"Introduce me, will you, Gordon?" said Lord Ferndale.

The old man made the introduction in his old-fashioned way.

"Your grandfather and I are old friends, Miss Gordon," said Lord Ferndale. "I learned something of botany from him; and a deuce of a trouble he must have had to teach me. Will you give me the next dance?"

Madge consented, and Lord Ferndale bore her off upon his arm.

Now, Lord Ferndale is a celebrity whose movements are watched with careful scrutiny, and not a soul in that crowded room failed to notice his beautiful partner. In hushed and hurried voice the question was put: "Who is she?" And no one could answer.

When the waltz was over, Lord Ferndale by chance led his beautiful partner to a seat near Lady Ferndale, the lady with the white hair whom Madge had so much admired, and Lady Ferndale, in an undertone, asked:

"Who is your partner, Edward?"

"Let me introduce her," he said, in his genial way. "My dear, this is the granddaughter of one of the greatest botanists in the kingdom, Herbert Gordon. My wife, Miss Gordon."

Lady Ferndale, with her sweet smile—and it was always sweet—extended her hand.

"I have heard my husband speak of your grandfather, Miss Gordon," she said. "I hope you are enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, very much," said Madge, in her direct way, and with the smile which had won Lord Norman's boyish heart. "This is my first ball."

Lady Ferndale looked at her with kindly interest. "I can remember my first ball," she said. "It was better than any of the others."

Madge understood, and was about to make some response, when she saw a couple of footmen draw the red cord across the room. She arose with a faint flush.

"I must go back now," she said.

"Why need you?" asked Lady Ferndale. "I will take care of you. Your grandfather is talking to my husband, and will not miss you."

Madge hesitated a moment; then, with her eyes fixed steadily on Lady Ferndale's, she said:

"I don't think your ladyship knows that I am in my wrong place here; I should be on the other side of the cord, with the tenants."

Lady Ferndale suppressed a smile of amusement, not unmixed with sympathy.

"You shall go presently, if you wish," she said, "and I will go with you. I don't approve of that barrier."

"My grandfather is the Earl of Chesney's gardener," said Madge, quietly.

Lady Ferndale nodded.

"That is scarcely a correct description, my dear," she said, placidly. "To be in charge of the Chesney gardens and tropical houses is not quite the same as being a gardener. Stay where you are, my dear."

Madge, who had risen, resumed her seat.

"Here comes Lord Landon," said Lady Ferndale, as a tall, distinguished-looking man approached them.

"One of your *protégées*, Lady Ferndale?" he said, in a low voice.

Presently he led Madge off as his partner in a square dance. The set was forming, and Madge saw that the couple opposite her and Lord Landon were Lady Sybil and a young squire of the neighborhood.

As Lord Landon and Madge approached, Lady Sybil stopped suddenly in the middle of a sentence she was addressing to her partner, and stared with cold hauteur at Madge. Then she drew back, and, fanning herself slowly, just as her mother had fanned herself five years ago in the Chase drawing-room, said, languidly:

"Do you know, I don't think I care for this dance. Don't let me deprive you of it, however; you can take me back to my mother."

The squire stared. He saw that something was the matter, but could not in the least discern what it was, or what had offended her.

"Oh, I don't care for it in the least; I would rather sit it

out with you, if you'll allow me, Lady Sybil," and he led her away. Another couple were quickly found to take her place, and Lord Landon, who had not noticed the haughty, insolent stare, began to talk to Madge. But her face was aflame, and her tongue tied. She had understood Lady Sybil's withdrawal from the set plainly enough; and immediately the dance was over she slipped her arm from Lord Landon's, and, much to his astonishment, lifted the red cord, and passed under it to the lower part of the room.

Her heart was beating painfully, but her face was pale and composed.

"Grandfather, aren't you tired?" she said, touching his arm; "wouldn't you like to go now?"

He looked up at her with vague astonishment.

"Go already?" he said, with evident satisfaction; then he shook his head. "We can't do that. It would seem singular to leave so early. Come and sit down, if you are tired."

She sat down beside him, and looked on at the dancers in silence. It had been her first experience of "the pride of this world"—her first lesson in social differences and distinctions—and it was naturally a bitter one to learn. She felt that she would rather die than pass the crimson cord again.

Presently she was conscious of a kind of stir, of subdued curiosity and interest, and looking up, she saw the crowd at the door making way for a tall old man, with a stern and deeply lined face, from which the dark eyes gleamed fiercely. A smile, not so much forced as icy and steel-like, curved his lip now and again; it never shone in his eyes, which remained fierce and hard, as he beamed right and left in response to the respectful greetings of those past whom he moved.

"It is the earl," said Mr. Gordon, in a low voice, but Madge had scarcely needed to be told.

As he came to where they sat, his dark eyes rested on the old man, and in returning his bow he paused for an instant and looked keenly at Madge, who met his scrutiny with a cold defiance in her face. He was the man who had struck her boy-lover, and driven him into the wide, pitiless world.

"He is looking ill to-night," remarked Mr. Gordon, half absently.

Madge watched him as he joined the aristocrats; the expression of his eyes, the hardness of his smile, unchanged. He seemed to be like a ghost—an evil spirit moving amidst the throng of happier mortals.

"Is it because he is ill that he looks so unhappy?" he asked.

Mr. Gordon hesitated, as if reluctant to discuss his employer, even with her.

"I don't know," he said. "Ill or not, he never seems happy. It is fortunate for all of us that we can not peer into each other's lives, Madge."

"Has his been a wicked life?" she said almost to herself.

The old man started slightly, and looked at her with surprise.

"Why do you say that? You can not know anything of his lordship's life, my dear."

"No," she said, "not much, grandfather—"

"How do you do, Miss Madge?" said a voice at her elbow. She turned her head quickly, and saw a tall young man with a thin, sallow face, and small eyes which were regarding her with a mixture of familiarity and covert watchfulness. He was thin and angular, and not by any means prepossessing, but there was an indication of some kind of power in his face that struck all who saw him.

Madge did not recognize him at once. Then she said:

"It is Silas Fletcher, isn't it?"

His thin lips curved with an expression of disappointment and faint resentment.

"You soon forget old—old friends, Miss Madge," he said, rather sullenly.

Madge smiled.

"Five years is a long while," she said. "You have been away five years, have you not?"

"Yes," he said, leaning against the wall and thrusting his hands into his pockets. "Pretty nearly. But I should have known you if it had been ten, twenty years since I'd seen you."

"Perhaps I've not altered so much as you have," she said.

"Oh, yes you have," he retorted. "We've both grown up since we saw each other last; and you've grown—" He would have liked to have said "beautiful," but he dared not with those blue eyes steadily regarding him. "You've grown very much."

Madge laughed softly.

"I can return the compliment with interest," she said. "And have you been in London all this time?"

"Yes," he said, with an air of self-satisfaction, and pulling up his collar as he spoke. "Ah, London is the place for a man."

Madge looked on him with the old feeling of dislike beginning to creep over her already. She noticed that he was fashionably dressed, but in some way or other he looked different to the other gentlemen—the “real” gentlemen in the room. His clothes fitted too well, the diamond shirt-stud was too large, the collar too high. As some wit has observed, he might have gone to a fancy ball disguised as a gentleman and no one would have known him.

“They say London is paved with gold,” she said. “I hope you have found it so.”

“Pretty fair,” he replied, with assumed self-satisfaction, and turning a heavy ring on his finger. “Yes, I fancy I’ve got on as well, perhaps better, than most people. My name’s not unknown in the City, Miss Madge.”

“I’m very glad to hear that you have been so successful,” said Madge, seeing, as she looked at him, not the tall young man in too well-cut evening-dress, but the gawky, sallow-faced lad whom Lord Norman had thrashed in the cottage garden. Back it all came to her as she sat there, and so intensely that she almost lost the sense of her present surroundings. A sigh escaped her. Here was Silas Fletcher, sleek and prosperous. Where was Lord Norman?

“You have to be pretty cute up there,” he said, happily unconscious of her reflections. “A man has to be awfully smart to hold his own.”

“And you are both cute and smart?” she could not help saying.

He winced and colored, and looked down at her suspiciously.

“You’re just as quick at quizzing a fellow as you used to be, I see, Miss Madge,” he said, half sullenly. “I never could hold my own with you in the old days, you know. But I don’t bear any malice. You could say anything you like to me without offending me. There! after that pretty speech, you can’t refuse me a dance.”

“I don’t wish to dance,” she said.

He glanced at her sideways.

“You’ve been dancing,” he said, dryly. “I saw you dancing with some of these swells a little while ago. I suppose you are too proud to dance with a mere commoner?”

Madge smiled. Her contempt for him was too intense to admit of anger.

“I will dance with you, if you wish it so much,” she said, quietly.

His sallow face flushed and his small eyes glittered eagerly.

“Why, it’s what I came down here for!” he said, un-

guardedly. Then as she looked at him with surprise and displeasure, he went on quickly: "Of course, I came to see my father and the old place, and—and all that; but I hoped that you would be here, and that I might get a dance with you. There's no harm in that, is there?"

Madge made no response, and they joined in the waltz.

Silas Fletcher danced well—better, for instance, than Lord Ferndale—but, nevertheless, Madge did not enjoy her waltz. That scene in the cottage garden kept rising before her.

"We've got each other's step to perfection, haven't we?" he whispered, proudly. The tone of vulgar familiarity gave Madge a shock, and she stopped at once.

"Oh, don't stop. Let us go on, do!" he said. "There isn't another couple in the room waltzing better than we are. See, they're looking, most of them."

Madge drew away from him.

"I am tired," she said. "But please do not lose the waltz. You can find another partner."

"No," he said, quietly enough, but with a tightening of his thin lips. "If I can't dance with you, I won't dance with any one."

But she would not yield, and went straight back to her grandfather. All her pleasure and delight had been spoiled—first by the proud insolence of Lady Sybil, and now by the presence and unwelcome attentions of Silas Fletcher.

"Surely we can go home now, grandfather?" she said, in a low voice.

He rose.

"Yes, I think so, if you like; but are you not enjoying yourself, Madge? I thought you were so eager to come, and looked forward to it so much."

She stifled a sigh.

"Yes, I did, dear," she said. "But—I think I am tired."

"Very well," he said, as she took his arm.

Silas Fletcher, who had been standing at a little distance watching them covertly, came forward.

"Not going home, surely?" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Fletcher," said Mr. Gordon, courteously. "My granddaughter is tired."

"Oh, well," he said, "I'm rather sick of it too. Perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me a lift? The governor will go home in the earl's carriage, and I haven't got a fly."

"Certainly; there will be plenty of room for you," said Mr. Gordon.

As they made their way to the door the crowd parted, and

the earl came down the room. He was leaning on Fletcher's arm and looking straight before him with an expression of cold weariness, as if he saw nothing, but the cunning eyes of the steward glanced watchfully from left to right.

It so happened that the two almost met Mr. Gordon, Madge, and young Silas, and old Fletcher nodded and said:

"Well, Silas, you've got down, then?"

The earl turned his hard, fierce eyes upon the three.

"Who are they?" he asked.

"Mr. Gordon—" began old Fletcher.

"I know that," interrupted the earl, with a sort of snarl.

"The others?"

"His granddaughter and my son Silas, my lord."

The earl nodded at Silas—who bowed with a sickly, servile smile—and then glanced at Madge, but passed on without a word.

Madge leaned back in the corner of the fly and closed her eyes. The music was still ringing in her ears, the brilliant crowd moving in a wild dance before her mental vision, and she did not see Silas Fletcher regarding her with a strange and eager gaze as he talked to Mr. Gordon.

When the fly pulled up at the cottage he leaped out and offered her his hand, and retained possession of her as he said, in a low, insinuating voice:

"Mr. Gordon has kindly asked me to come and see him tomorrow; I want to have a look at the dear old cottage garden, you know."

"He will be very pleased," said Madge.

"And you? Won't you be pleased to see an old friend—playmate—Miss Madge?" he murmured.

Madge was sorely tempted to retort, "You were never an old friend or playmate of mine, Silas Fletcher," but she looked up, and merely nodded.

Silas Fletcher stood with the gate in his hand for some minutes after they had entered the house and the door had closed behind them, his thin lips compressed tightly, an ugly look in his sallow face.

"Treats me like a dog—like a dog," he muttered. "Who's she to give herself airs to me; me, Silas Fletcher, who am growing rich and—and somebody of consequence in the world? I feel as if I ought to hate her; but I can't—I can't! She's grown as beautiful as an angel; and—and I love her. Yes, and I'll marry her!" he exclaimed, under his breath; and he struck the gate with his big white hand. "I'll marry her in spite of her airs and graces. I've never yet been

talked of anything I've set my heart upon, and I've set my heart upon you, Miss Madge."

He looked up at the window—the window to which Norman had climbed five years ago.

"There she is!" he muttered. "I used to stand behind the laurels when I was a boy and watch her shadow. I loved her then, and she hated me. She told me so, and she looked to-night as if she would tell me so again. But I'll win her for all that! Yes, my proud beauty, I'll teach you that Silas Fletcher is not the man to be treated like a dog; that he can hold fast—and bite, too!"

In his passionate resentment, and still more passionate desire, the mean face grew almost strong, the lean, angular figure seemed to acquire something like dignity, and as he wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead, he waved his hand toward the window, upon which Madge's shadow moved, with a gesture half imploring, half threatening.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT same night, but many thousand miles away, a young man rode over an Australian plain. The stars, glittering like diamonds in the marvelously clear air, shone down upon what seemed an interminable prairie land—a wide-stretching pasturage, unbroken by tree or shrub, and wrapped in a silence so intense that the dull beat of the horse's hoofs were startling in their regularity and monotony.

The rider had been in the saddle for hours—since day-break, in fact, with but short intervals—and both he and the horse were tired; but they still went on with the measured gallop which seems the most fitting pace on the soft, springy Australian turf.

Glancing up at the stars now and again as if he were steering his way by them, he rode straight and unhesitatingly, every now and then speaking a word to his horse—the word which that friend of man covets and loves so intensely. At last a slight, rugged line appeared on the horizon, and at sight of it the horse increased its pace. The young man seemed to settle down hopefully in the saddle, and in a cheery tone he said:

"Home, sweet home, Prince; but take it easy, old man!"

The rugged line soon developed into a fringe of trees, and threading his way without the least hesitation, the horse reached a low log hut placed in the center of a small clearing.

The young man dismounted, and, dropping the reins, struck

light, and lighted a lantern which hung outside the hut. Then he took off the saddle and bridle, and carefully, lovingly, groomed the horse, brought it a pail of water and a feed of oats, and with a "There you are, old chap! Good-night!" entered the hut, leaving the animal, in the assurance that he would come to his master's call in the morning.

The embers of a great log fire were burning on the hearth, and the young man stirred these into a blaze, and proceeded to prepare his supper. Now, the supper of an Australian runner at solitary stations of the great cattle runs consists usually of tea, biscuits, and meat, so also does the breakfast, so likewise the dinner—when he is fortunate enough to get one. Plain meals enough, but a veritable feast to the man whose appetite is always keenly edged by hard work in the open air, a temperate life, and the soundest of sound sleep.

The loneliness of the hut and its surroundings it would be impossible to describe. The nearest human habitation was the next station, scores and scores of miles distant. An out-runner, such as this young man was, might spend weeks, perhaps months, without seeing a fellow-creature, without hearing a human voice, with no one to speak a word to but his horse and his dogs. A hard life, one calculated to turn a man's hair gray, it would be thought; but this young man's hair was by no means gray, and his handsome face was cheerful and good to look upon, and his voice, as he spoke to his dogs—who sat as close as they could to him, and watched him with affectionate gratitude as he shared his supper with them—was bright and resolute enough.

Having finished the meal, he filled his pipe from a pouch of raw hide—filled it carefully, for there was no tobacconist in the next street—and stretching himself at full length, smoked with the peaceful contentment of the man who has earned Nature's great boon.

The three dogs coiled themselves near him, and the silence seemed to grow more intense and profound from the cessation of his conversation with them. Presently he finished his pipe, and took a thick blanket from the rough corner cupboard, wrapped it round him, and rolling up his coat for a pillow, made himself ready for the reception of tired Nature's sweet restorer—sleep. But before he lay down he took a small package from the breast-pocket of this thick cord waistcoat, and looked at it and turned it over, as a devotee regards his most sacred relic. Then he replaced it in the pocket just over his heart, and extending his long, muscular limbs, went to sleep with business-like promptitude.

The dogs followed suit; but presently, about half an hour later, one of them—the sharpest of the three—opened an eye, started uneasily, and uttered a faint growl.

The young man was awake in an instant—for he too slept, so to speak, with an eye and an ear open.

"What's the matter, old girl?" he asked. The dog looked up and wagged her tail slowly; then she rose and stood stiff as a ramrod, staring at the door and growling.

Her master got up and listened, and after a moment or two heard the thud, thud which the solitary cattle-runner quickly learns to distinguish.

"Some one coming, eh, Betsey?" he said, and, as if in response, the other dogs growled angrily.

"Quiet!" he said; and as they crouched down with the growl reduced to a whimper, he rose, and revolver, in hand, went to the door and opened it.

The night was so clear, the stars so bright, that he could see a tremendous distance across the plain, and he presently saw a horseman riding toward the wood.

He lighted a pipe and sat down beside the door, and watched the new-comer with calm patience. It was evident that the horseman had seen the wood, for he rode straight to it, and in a few minutes was threading the trees.

At sight of the hut—and he came upon it suddenly, round a bend—he pulled up short, and his hand went to his belt. The dogs rushed out, barking furiously, Prince neighed a welcome to his fellow-creature, and the young man rose and approached the traveler.

"Good-evening," he said, courteously.

The man's hand left his belt, and he nodded.

"Good-evening. Thank Heaven!" and he drew a long breath and laughed a peculiar laugh. "My horse must have smelled oats, poor devil, for he brought me straight here. And it's as well he did, for we were both nearly played out."

He dismounted as he spoke, and hitching the bridle to a bush, stretched himself like a man stiff and weary.

"Come in," said the young man—he had replaced his revolver in his belt. "Sit down"—he drew an empty cask to the fire—"I'll soon get you some supper."

"Thanks," said the stranger, and he flung himself full length beside the fire. "I shall be particularly grateful, for I haven't seen food for twenty-four hours."

"That's bad," said the young man. "Here, start on this, while I see to your horse," and he handed him a tin of biscuits.

"Oh, the horse is all right," said the other, carelessly.

The young fellow said nothing to this, but having put the kettle on the fire, went out and rubbed down the horse and fed him.

When he re-entered, his guest was lying, with his pistol in his grasp, dead asleep.

The young man lighted the lantern, and set a pannikin of tinned meat beside the kettle. In so doing he displaced a log, and the noise of the falling woke the sleeper. He sprang to his feet, and holding his revolver, stood as if on the defensive.

Now, the young man had hung the lantern on a beam, and the light fell full upon their faces; and as they stood and looked at each other, upon their countenances began to dawn an expression of astonishment which grew into startled amazement.

For each detected an extraordinary resemblance between them. The shape of the face, the features, the form and bearing, were as alike as if they had been twins. It would have been difficult to identify them apart.

The young man of the hut was the first to recover from his amazement.

"You can put your revolver away," he said, quietly. "I am not a bushranger anxious for your purse."

"Nor I, mate," said the other, with a laugh; and both, now that they had seen the resemblance between face and figure, noticed the resemblance in their voices. "I beg your pardon; I've been traveling with my life in my hands; and starting out of sleep— There!" He broke off, and flung the revolver into a corner and held out his hand. The other young man took it.

"Supper's ready," he said, quietly. "Take my advice and have it first and sleep after."

"Thanks; I can't express my gratitude. Will you tell me your name?"

"My name is Harry Richmond," was the reply.

The other nodded.

"And mine's Harold Thane," he said, lifting the tin teacan. "Here's your health, mate!"

Harry Richmond nodded in response. He would have responded in words, but the lantern and the fire-light were shining on his guest's face, and its resemblance to his own again struck him dumb.

"No; he comes at call."

Thane smiled.

"My devil would bolt in a moment," he said, as the left the hut. On his way to the stream, which ran just outside the wood, he paused now and again and scanned the plain with an anxiety which deepened the lines between his eyes and tightened his lips; then, seeming reassured by the solitude which met his gaze, he filled the horse's bucket, and returned to the hut.

"Breakfast is ready," said Harry Richmond. "Excuse the plate, it's rather battered, but it's the best of the two."

"I haven't seen a plate for—for a long time," remarked Thane, "and the unaccustomed luxury almost unmans me. You're a first-rate cook, Richmond; never tasted better tea or chops." He eat in silence for a moment or two, then said:

"How long have you been here? It's an out-station, of course?"

Harry nodded.

"Yes. I've been here nearly a fortnight, I think. One loses count of time when one lives by one's self."

"And how far is the chief station, the boss's place, for I suppose you're not your own master?"

"No," replied Harry. "I am one of Mr. Brownley's hands. His place is nearly forty miles away." He pointed to the south.

"Got much sheep and cattle here?" asked Thane.

"Fairly," was the reply. "The pasture's extra good here, and they do well, better than up at the big place."

"When do you get relieved?" asked Thane, sipping his tea.

"Not before the end of the month. I've got plenty of provisions"—he nodded toward the meal-tub and biscuit-box—"so that you needn't hurry away for fear of starving me out."

"Thanks," said Thane. He thought for a moment or two; then, lying down, and leaning his head upon his hand, his eyes fixed on Harry Richmond's face, he said: "To tell you the truth, I should like to stay and chum up with you. I've been on a cattle run myself."

"Oh," said Harry, "what run?"

The other hesitated, but so slightly that Harry Richmond did not notice it.

"Oh, a long way from here, at a place called Wallyluna."

Harry Richmond shook his head.

"I don't know it."

Thane smiled slightly.

"I dare say not; it's far down west. But I was going to say that I know my business, and can do my fair share of work, and if you like to take me on as an extra hand—"

Harry Richmond looked up with a laugh.

"I'm not master," he said. "I dare say Mr. Brownley wouldn't object, but I can't answer for him, and as you wouldn't care to work without wages—"

The other interrupted him with a smile. "We'll let the wages question slide," he said. "I'm not quite a pauper." As he spoke he took out a canvas bag and shook it, and the pleasant chink of coin ran through the hut. "See? Oh, I don't care about the wages. I'll work with you for my bed and board."

He spoke carelessly enough, but he watched the other's face with ill-concealed anxiety.

"Very well," said Harry Richmond. "So be it. "I will go as far as the bed and board, and when Mr. Brownley comes down we can see about the wages."

"Oh, that's all right," said Thane. "I dare say you won't be sorry to have a chum; it is jolly dreary and lonely by one's self."

Harry Richmond nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes," he assented. "Not that I mind it as much as some do. I'm used to it; but notwithstanding that, I'm glad of a companion; besides, there's almost more than one can manage here, and I was thinking of asking for some assistance."

"Why, then, I'm a perfect godsend!" said Thane, with a laugh. "You'll find that I'm not difficult to get along with, and I hope we shall agree like brothers, or better than some do. By the way"—and he looked at Harry Richmond with a smile—"we're so alike that we might be taken for brothers—eh?"

"Yes," answered Harry. "It's singular our being so alike and meeting out in this wild place."

A runner's day is a busy one, and there is not much time for sitting over meals, excepting the evening one, and very soon the men were mounted and away, the dogs running beside them and looking almost as knowing as they really were.

The cattle were not difficult to find and keep together, for the pasturage was good, and there was plenty of water, and Harry Richmond had time to observe his new mate and discover that Harold Thane was well up to his work. He rode almost as well as Harry himself, and Harry was accounted the best

rider in the station—that is to say, the best where nearly all were first-rate.

At noonday they rested, and eat their dinner beside the stream, and Harold Thane proved himself a remarkably pleasant companion. The night's rest and the square meals had, as he himself said, made a new man of him, and he talked and laughed quite gayly, so that Harry was fain to admit to himself that it was far pleasanter to have a chum near to look at and listen to. Harry himself was not a great talker.

They reached home at nightfall tired, wholesomely so, and Thane at once proceeded to take his part in preparing the evening meal.

"I could see you were used to the work," Harry remarked, as they sat round the fire smoking their pipes. "I can tell a runner in a minute. Why did you leave that place? What did you call it?"

"Wallyluna," said Thane. "Oh, got tired of it, I think; and there were other reasons. It's too long a story, and, indeed, there's nothing in it."

"And what have you been doing since?" asked Harry.

"Just moving about and taking a turn at anything that came to hand, shearing here and rail-splitting there. I did have a try at the gold-digging, but there was no luck for me."

"Gold?" said Harry, pricking up his ears. "I didn't know there was any in these parts."

Thane folded his hands behind his head, and laughed softly, his eyes fixed dreamily on the fire.

"There's gold all over Australia," he said, quietly. "The difficulty is to find it. Once or twice I've thought that I had spotted it—in some of the creeks; but there was never enough to pay for the washing. Luck has always seemed against me. But I suppose that most men in Australia would say the same. It's only bad luck that sends us here!"

Harry nodded thoughtfully.

"We've all got a history to tell," Thane went on. "Mine is a very simple one. I could find nothing to do in England, and rather than be a burden to my mother—she is a widow—I came out here to 'make my fortune.'" He laughed, with a touch of bitterness. "That's some years ago, and I haven't made much of that fortune yet, and never shall, I suppose."

"It takes a long time," said Harry, dreamily.

"Have you been out long? I can see you are an English-

man, of course, and equally, of course, a gentleman, Richmond. That goes without saying."

"Five years nearly," said Harry, still dreamily.

"And what made you come out?" Thane asked, with pleasant interest.

Harry hesitated.

"Oh, it's too long a story," he said. "I ran away from school—from a relative, got taken on board a ship by mistake, and worked my passage out."

"Yes? And you like it well enough to stick here?"

Harry suppressed a sigh.

"I don't know about liking it," he said; "I stick here because it would be of no use going home; and I haven't got what I came out for yet."

"What's that?"

"The same as you—a fortune," replied Harry, with a smile.

"I suppose you could go back if you liked; your friends are always begging and beseeching you to return? My mother wrote imploring letters to me, until I told her it was of no use. Your friends do the same, I suppose?"

"No," said Harry, grimly; "I have no friends."

"Phew!" whistled Thane, "that's bad!"

"Well, when I say no friends—I may have one."

He was thinking of the small garden at Chesney Chase, of Madge's good-bye kiss; and the mental vision made him disinclined for further conversation. He yawned and took off his jacket.

"Time to turn in," he said.

"Right," assented Thane.

As he spoke he saw Harry Richmond take the small flat packet from the breast-pocket of his coat and thrust it inside his shirt, and Thane's eyes grew keen and curious; but he said nothing, of course, and soon both were asleep.

As the days wore on, the two men grew friendly. It would have been strange if they had not, for Lord Norman had a warm heart and was incapable of suspicion, distrust, or coldness; and Thane seemed to be anything but a bad fellow. He never shirked his work, and always seemed good-tempered, even when a kind of silent fit attacked him, as it sometimes did. Harry always knew when this fit was on his chum, because Thane would go off by himself for a short time and tramp the woods, and when he returned, would sit silent and thoughtful beside the fire.

On these occasions Harry was very gentle with him, and took care to keep silent and apparently unobservant.

The day just after Thane had come out of one of those gloomy fits, they were riding side by side along a narrow valley, down which some of the cattle had strayed.

"Very pretty, this?" Harry remarked.

Thane did not respond at once, but looked round about him as if lost in thought; then he said: "Pretty? Oh! yes—yes," but in an absent-minded way. "Ever here before, Richmond?"

"Only just at the brow of the valley," Lord Norman replied. "The cattle have never taken to this valley before; I don't know why they have done so now, the water is not nearly so plentiful. You see, the bed is almost dry in some parts."

"Y—es," assented Thane. "We sha'n't reach home to-night, and will have to camp out, unless we come upon them pretty quickly. Cattle-running is hard work for small pay, isn't it?" he added, grimly.

Lord Norman nodded.

"Especially when there is no pay, as in your case, Thane."

"Oh, I don't mind that," said Thane. "I'm satisfied with my bargain. But just think, Richmond, with fair luck one could earn as much in a day in the gold-fields as one could make in a year at this business."

"I dare say," said Harry, looking round for tracks of the cattle. "Here they are. They've crossed the stream lower down. Come on!" and calling the dogs together, he rode on quickly.

Thane followed more slowly, and looking about him as he went. When they reached the bed of the stream he bent down in the saddle, and looked hard at the sandy track over which the water had run. Something interesting evidently caught his eye, for, with a stifled exclamation, he flung himself from the saddle, and, as it seemed, with the same movement, on his knees, and, scraping up a handful of the sand and gravel, examined it closely. A strange look came into his face, which went white, and his knees trembled. He dropped the handful of grit, and, with the bridle slung over his arm, sat down, picked up his pipe, and began to smoke, staring straight before him with a rapt expression in his eyes.

Now Harry had, following the tracks, ridden partly up the hill, and not hearing Thane behind him, turned in his saddle, and, with astonishment, saw that he had dismounted.

Thinking that something might have happened to him, he shouted. Thane made no response, and Harry, with some impatience and grave anxiety, trotted back to him.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked, scanning Thane's face.

"Nothing, thanks," replied Thane.

"Come on, then," said Harry. "They've gone over the hill, and they can't be far off. Come, and we'll get a rest and a smoke when we've turned them."

"Gone over the hill, have they?" said Thane, not sullenly, but with slow emphasis. "They may go to the devil, Richmond, for all you and I care."

Lord Norman stared at him. Had the man gone mad?

"What on earth do you mean?" he said. "Come on, Thane; if we don't turn them before nightfall we shall lose no end of them."

"Let them go," said Thane, smiling leisurely. "What does it matter? You and I are rich enough to buy half a million of sheep."

Harry concluded that his chum *had* gone mad, and getting off his horse, he laid his hand on Thane's shoulder.

"What's the matter, Thane?" he said, for he felt that Thane was trembling, notwithstanding his apparent *sang-froid*. "Do you feel queer?"

Thane looked up at him.

"Well, just as queer as a man is likely to feel when he learns that he has come into a big fortune."

"A big fortune?"

Harry looked at the pale face, and then round about him and up at the sky.

"Dash it all, man," he said, "what are you talking about? How have you heard of this fortune? Where is it?"

Thane raised his hand, and pointed to the stream.

"There!" he said.

Then he clutched Harry's arm and whispered, feverishly:

"Don't shout! The birds of the air will carry it! the very sheep will tell it! Richmond, there's gold in this stream! Gold! Not a mere dribble, nor an ounce or two, but piles!"

He struck Harry's arm fiercely.

"D—n it!" he said, in the same harsh whisper, "don't you understand? But I suppose it has knocked you silly for the moment, as it did me! Come! Come quietly, and mind, not a shout! Speak under your breath. Here!" and almost dragging Harry with him, he went down to the stream, scooped up a handful of the gravel, and held it out.

"Look, man! Do you see?"

At first Harry saw nothing but sand and small stones, then he caught the glitter of some yellowish-red specks.

As he rode along with a sternly set face, it occurred to him that he might ride over to the head-station and state the case to Mr. Brownley; but in an instant he saw that that would not be fair to Harold Thane. It was he who had discovered the gold by the aid of his knowledge and experience, and it would not be fair to proclaim the discovery. He wished, as he called the dogs together, and followed the tracks, that Harold had been less indifferent to the fate of the sheep, and he felt rather disappointed in him; but, young as he was, he had learned to make allowances for human nature. And what an influence over this same human nature has the terrible yellow metal!

He came up with the cattle at last, and drove them back to their pasture.

As he came down the hill into the valley he saw Harold Thane, naked to the waist, working like a demon in the stream. He had got a shovel from the hut and made a rude "cradle," and to have done this, and traveled to the hut and back, he must have ridden at almost racing pace. The horse stood haltered to a tree, trembling, wet with sweat, and flecked with foam.

Thane looked up at the sound of the cattle.

"Get them across as quick as you can," he said, pointing. "Have you changed your mind, Richmond? You are going to stay! I've brought some grub, enough to last us for a couple of days; one doesn't eat much when the gold fever is on. Stay, stay! Let those miserable cattle go where they please; they're all right."

Harry shook his head.

"I can't," he said, simply.

Thane opened a handkerchief, and temptingly displayed a small heap of gold-dust; but Harry shook his head again.

"I'm not a free man; you are," he said. "I can't leave the cattle."

Thane swore under his breath, and caught up the shovel.

"You are a fool!" he said, angrily. "Go your own way. But look here, I—can trust you, Richmond? You won't say a word? You won't split?"

Lord Norman flushed hotly. "You can trust me," he responded, coldly. "I shall not say a word. The gold is yours, and yours alone, justly and fairly yours. And—and I wish you luck," he added, as he rode away behind the stream of cattle.

He felt very lonely that night, and very wretched, if the truth must be told. He missed Thane, and mingled with the

Harry nodded.

"Look here," he said. "If you think I'm indifferent to this discovery of yours—if you think that I'm not anxious to seize the fortune—" He broke off with a sudden pallor and a flash of the eye.

"Thane!" he exclaimed, in a kind of agony. "The hope of my life lies there. A fortune means to me the fulfillment of a life's dream, such joy and happiness— But I can't play the knave and betray the man who has trusted me. Don't tempt me. No! not a word," and he held up his hand. "Go where you will, do what you please; but I—" And turning his horse, he galloped furiously up the hill.

Thane waited a moment, swearing fearfully, then he dug his spurs into the horse and dashed off in the direction of the hut.

CHAPTER X.

HARRY RICHMOND rode after those sheep, feeling extremely sick and weary, but as firm and unyielding as ever. It was hard lines. There, so Harold Thane said, lay a fortune at his feet, only waiting to be scooped up, and yet Honor would not permit him to avail himself of it.

And it meant so much to him, that gold. It meant his return to England—and Madge! For deep down in his heart flourished steadily a passion, grown in the silence and solitude of five years, from the boy-and-girl engagement made in the small garden at Chesney Chase. Just as Madge was always thinking of him, so was he always thinking of her. He had so little else to think of. She was always in his mind, and before him ever glowed the hope of returning with enough to claim her. Sometimes a dread that she might have forgotten him sent a cold chill over him, but it never lasted long; for somehow, boy as he was when they had plighted troth, he had been intelligent enough to recognize and appreciate her truthful, steadfast nature. No, she had not forgotten him, she was waiting for him; and if he would only bring himself to betray the trust reposed in him by the man who employed him; if he would only let those sheep and cattle go to the devil, as Harold Thane had said, she would not have to wait long.

The temptation was a sore one, well-nigh irresistible; one before which most men would have gone down; but Lord Norman had only changed his name. Not his nature, and he did not yield.

As he rode along with a sternly set face, it occurred to him that he might ride over to the head-station and state the case to Mr. Brownley; but in an instant he saw that that would not be fair to Harold Thane. It was he who had discovered the gold by the aid of his knowledge and experience, and it would not be fair to proclaim the discovery. He wished, as he called the dogs together, and followed the tracks, that Harold had been less indifferent to the fate of the sheep, and he felt rather disappointed in him; but, young as he was, he had learned to make allowances for human nature. And what an influence over this same human nature has the terrible yellow metal!

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Thane looked up at the sound of the cattle.

"Get them across as quick as you can," he said, panting.

"Have you changed your mind, Richmond? You are going to stay! I've brought some grub, enough to last us for a couple of days; one doesn't eat much when the gold fever is on. Stay, stay! Let those miserable cattle go where they please; they're all right."

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Lord Norman flushed hotly. "You can trust me," he responded, coldly. "I shall not say a word. The gold is yours, and yours alone, justly and fairly yours. And—and I wish you luck," he added, as he rode away behind the stream of cattle.

He felt very lonely that night, and very wretched, if the truth must be told. He missed Thane, and mingled with the

feeling of loss was one of disappointment. Somehow, he felt that if he had been in Harold Thane's place he would not have acted as he had done. But after a time he began to make excuses for him, and on fell asleep, sighing for the fortune that he could not grasp, yet somewhat consoled by that rarest of rare possessions—a good conscience.

Next morning he ate his solitary breakfast and started off on his work. Fortunately for him he had to ride in a direction away from the valley, so that he was not obliged to face temptation; and it so happened that the following day also the cattle led him away from the spot where "fortune lay awaiting him." On the third day, however, he had to go in the direction of the valley, and having got his sheep together, he continued his ride into the ravine. He had brought some food for Thane.

To his amazement, Thane was not to be seen. When he came to the stream he saw the shovel and the cradle lying on the ground as if they had been thrown hastily aside, and, rather alarmed, as well as surprised, Harry dismounted to search for tracks of Thane. He found them in the mud by the river's bed, and following them, made his way up beside the stream to the narrow opening in the rocks. They ceased there; and he was looking round anxiously when he heard a groan.

It came from a small opening in the rock, and, hurrying there, Harry saw Thane lying full length with his face resting on his arms, seemingly, but for the groan, dead as a doornail.

"Good heavens! Thane, what has happened?" he exclaimed.

Thane raised his head and looked at him, at first with no intelligence in his eyes, which were red-rimmed and blood-shot; and, as usual, his hand went straying to his revolver.

Harry bent over him and touched him, and the touch told him what was the matter.

"Halloo, Thane!" he said, gently, "you are ill, man. Can you get up, sit up?"

Thane struggled into a sitting posture, and stared around him in a bewildering fashion; then he nodded at Harry.

"It's fever, Richmond, isn't it?" he said, in a strained, cracked voice. "How did you find me? I—I thought I should die all alone here."

"You didn't suppose I'd leave you, desert you?" said Harry. "I've brought you some food."

"I couldn't touch it. I have got the bush-fever. I must have stuck at it too hard the first day—I worked all day and night, of course."

He stopped to groan, and laid his head on his hands.

"I know," said Harry, simply.

"Then the cursed thing took me all in a minute, my head seemed to spin, and—and I just managed to crawl up here out of the sun, and—"

"I know," said Harry again. "Just wait a minute." He ran down to the stream and mixed some brandy and water in a cup of his flask and carried it up to the stricken man. Thane seized it with shaking hands and managed to get it down.

"What is to be done?" he said.

"Why, there's only one thing to do; to get you home," responded Harry.

Thane sighed and looked at the stream, not wistfully, as Harry expected him to do, but in a disappointed, despairing way which puzzled Harry.

"You can come back when you are all right again, you know," he said.

Thane shook his head and then let it drop.

"I sha'n't want to come back."

"No?"

"No, Richmond, I was deceived! The gold in the stream doesn't amount to anything. If—if"—he held his throbbing head—"if there is any, it's locked up in the rock here, and we should want proper tools, even blasting material. No, it's all over. Lord, how ill I am!"

Harry felt for the man. He brought the horse up to the edge of the cave.

"Now, then, old chap!" he said.

"What are you going to do?" groaned Thane.

"Put you on the horse and get you home," said Harry; and almost lifting him bodily, he placed him in the saddle. "Now, lean on me as much as you can, and we'll go slowly. With a nip or two of brandy you'll get home all right enough; and a couple of days—"

Thane groaned and shook his head.

"You are quite the Good Samaritan, Richmond," he said, feebly, "and—and I don't deserve it, do I? But the sight of the gold drove me mad—"

"Don't worry to talk," said Harry. "Lean on me as much as you can."

They got home at last. It seemed a long time to Lord

Norman; it must have seemed ages to Thane, who had just strength to crawl into the hut, and fall full length on the rough bed Harry made for him.

He lay with closed eyes for a time, but he opened them and watched with keen interest, as Harry, taking a spade, began to dig in a corner of the hut.

"What are you digging? My grave?" he panted.

Harry smiled, stooped down, and lifted a small wooden box from the hole.

"That is my treasure-chest," he explained.

Thane's eyes glistened with something more than fever.

"Treasure?" he gasped.

"Yes. All my savings are here," said Harry, tapping the box. "But there's something else more valuable just at present—quinine;" and he took out a small bottle and measured out a dose.

Thane raised himself on his elbow to take it, and looked into the box as it lay close by the head of the bed. It contained a canvas bag, full of money, no doubt, and a small book bound in leather, with a clasp. It looked like an account book.

"What's the book?" panted Thane.

Harry Richmond took it up and looked at it thoughtfully.

"Well, it's a kind of diary. Not quite that, though, but an account of my early life," he said.

Thane stared at him.

"What on earth did you write it down for?" he gasped.

Harry Richmond dropped the book into the box.

"I scarcely know. A whim, I suppose. It was something to do when I was up here alone. And"—he paused—"well, I had a reason for setting it all down. I may tell you some day; I'm not sure; we'll see. But what you've got to do now is to shut your eyes and try and sleep. I'll put this back again; leaving out the quinine, of course."

Thane, with difficulty, produced two bags, one made with his pocket-handkerchief, and the canvas bag he had shown to Lord Norman on the night of his arrival.

"Put—put these with it," he said. "It's gold-dust in the handkerchief."

Harry deposited them in the box with the other things, then replaced it in the hole, filled it up, and rolled the meal-tub over it.

Thane turned over and groaned himself into a restless, shuddering doze.

Harry sat with him all that night, and for the greater part

of the next day—he had to leave him for some portion of it to see after the cattle—sat beside him, bathing his hot forehead and administering the proper doses of quinine, with a patience and devotion worthy of a woman.

Now and again Thane grew delirious, and raved and talked wildly; and once or twice he seemed to be speaking to some girl whom he addressed as “Mary.” At times his tone was full of an affection not short of passion, then it was cold and contemptuous; and once, at the close of one of these delirious monologues, he sprung up and, with a cry of fear, put out his hand, as if to thrust from him something that threatened him.

Charity is its own reward. You can’t nurse a sick dog, horse, or monkey without growing attached to it; and Harry, notwithstanding that Thane had disappointed him in the matter of the gold business, grew strangely fond of the sick man. He sat for hours holding his hand, and answering the feverish, peevish questions and ejaculations which fell from the hot, dry lips. Once or twice he thought that he would ride over to the head-station and fetch help; but he could not bring himself to leave the sick man alone for so long a time as the journey would take, and so he did not go. Would that he had.

About the fifth morning his devoted nursing was rewarded. Thane opened his eyes with the light of returned intelligence in them.

“Ah, Richmond,” he said, “you’ve stuck by me, then? I thought you’d have borne me a grudge over that gold; but you—you haven’t; you’ve stuck to me like a brother.” He held out his hand, and Lord Norman took it and wrung it gently.

“All right, old chap,” he said. “No, I don’t bear you any grudge. Don’t you talk now, but get some sleep after you’ve taken this broth.”

Thane slept for several hours, and awoke refreshed, and evidently on the right side of the Shadow of Death through which he had been passing.

“Did I rave much?” he asked Harry, in the course of their talk that evening.

“N—o,” said Harry. “Not much.”

Thane looked at him keenly with his hollow eyes.

“Told no secrets, I hope?” he said, with a faint color.

“No,” said Harry. “And if you had, I should have made it my business to forget them.”

Thane eyed him suspiciously for a moment, then sighed.

“We all have secrets, the best of us,” he said, in a low

voice. He turned his eyes on Harry again. "You've got yours, I'll bet, Richmond?"

Now, remember that Lord Norman had been nursing this man, and so acquired a kind of brotherly tenderness for him.

And so remembering, do not blame him or call him a confiding fool because when, upon Thane's remarking, "I've often thought when I've been looking at you and watching you that you are not what you seem, Richmond—that you're—well, what they call a 'swell' in England," Harry responded, "I don't know about that, old chap. If you mean that Harry Richmond isn't my real name, you are right. It isn't."

"What is it?" asked Thane, softly.

Lord Norman, looking straight before him, dreamily replied:

"Norman Lechmere." Then he added, with a laugh, and something like a sigh as he remembered how Madge had asked the same question, "There's more than that of it—Norman Eldred Beauchamp Fitz-George Lechmere."

Thane leaned on his elbow and looked at him attentively.

"Lechmere—Lechmere!" he said, as if he were trying to recall something. "Isn't that the family name of one of the noble families?"

"The Chesneys," said Norman, simply. "My uncle is Lord Chesney."

Thane's eyes dilated, then closed, as if he did not want his companion to see his astonishment.

"You are a swell indeed," he said. "Are you a lord, too?"

"Yes," said Lord Norman; "there is a distinct title on my father's side; it's rather confusing, and it doesn't matter, so I'm called Lord Lechmere."

"Lord Lechmere!" Thane repeated under his breath. "Good Heaven! And you are living a dog's life—a cattle-runner in this confounded country! You must be mad! Oh, it makes me mad to think of it! About five minutes is the time I'd stay in this hole if I were in your place and what you are. Why on earth did you come here—my lord, I suppose I ought to say?"

"We'll drop that, I think, please," said Lord Norman, with a short laugh. "Why did I come here? Well, yes; I feel like telling you. It will amuse you, and pass the time; but don't laugh, Thane, for though it may seem fun to you, it is all very serious to me."

"I sha'n't laugh," said Thane, dropping back on the rug

that served for a pillow; "go on;" and he fixed his keen eyes on the face which was so like his own.

Lord Norman, after a slight pause, started on his tale. He began with his school-days, and the finding of Madge in the small garden, and as he told the story of their meeting, their betrothal, his voice faltered now and again and grew husky. But it cleared as he related the scene in the Chase drawing-room with Lady Delamoore and her daughter, and grew rather fierce when he got to the blow dealt him by the earl.

"And you ran away there and then?" said Thane, in a low voice. "Yes; it is just what you would do. And the little girl, Richmond—I beg your pardon—I mean Norman—"

"No, no! call me Richmond, please."

"All right. I was going to say that your description of her makes a distinct picture of her in my mind. By Heaven! I can almost see her! Did you meet her again before you bolted?"

Lord Norman nodded.

"Yes," he said. And he told something—if not all—of their parting in the small garden, of his climbing to the window, and exchanging gifts; and as he spoke, his hand mechanically went to his breast.

"And you've got the handkerchief and the lock of hair in your pocket?" said Thane. "By Jove! it's—it's a romance!"

Lord Norman smiled rather sadly, as he sat with his chin resting in his strong, brown hand.

"That's what I thought when I wrote it all down," he said, almost to himself.

"Oh! That's what you've written in that pocket-book?" said Thane. "What did you do that for?"

Lord Norman laughed shortly, as if half ashamed.

"I—I scarcely know. Well, yes, I do. I thought that if anything happened to me—and things often do happen to us chaps—I've buried several mates out here in the wilds—"

"Yes; so have I," said Thane, softly.

"—That if I got knocked on the head I should like the book sent to her—to show her that—that I haven't forgotten her."

"I see. Haven't you written to her?"

"N—o!" said Lord Norman. "Our meeting and—and engagement—for mark me, Thane, I hold myself as firmly bound to her as if we had been solemnly betrothed—why, we *were* solemnly betrothed!" he broke off. "But it was a secret, and a letter might have fallen into other hands, and got her into trouble. Then, again, I thought at first"—he

smiled sadly—"that it wouldn't take me long to make a fortune. I know better now."

"But—but you are the next heir, aren't you?" said Thane, raising himself on his elbow. "What the devil do you want with a fortune? Isn't there enough money?"

"Quite enough; too much," said Lord Norman; "but it isn't mine; it is my uncle's, and"—his face flushed under the tan, and his eyes shone—"I'd rather die here where I sit than touch a penny of it."

Thane stared at him.

"By Jove! But you mayn't have to wait long."

Lord Norman bit his lips.

"He is not an old man, and I don't want him to die," he said. "I'd rather earn the money with my own hands, and take it to her as—as—"

"As a love offering?" filled in Thane.

Lord Norman nodded. The telling of the story had awakened old memories, had aroused the pangs of hope deferred. He saw the vision of Madge standing at the open door of the hut.

"Yes," he said. "I'll—I'll just have a pipe outside. Perhaps you'll get a little sleep if I'm out of the way and you can't talk."

Thane fell back, but stared up at the roof with anything but sleepy eyes. They were shining with a strange glitter.

Lord Norman went outside. The moon was shining softly, making the trees like sharp-cut silhouettes against the deep-blue sky.

He thought of Madge with an infinite yearning. He could almost see her sweet young face as she leaned from the window to kiss him, and almost felt her innocent soft lips on his cheeks. Little wonder, then, that he nearly cried aloud, and that he sprang back when, from among the trees, a woman moved toward him and, with a suppressed cry as she saw him, sprang upon him and grasped his arm.

CHAPTER XL

WHEN the woman sprang forward and seized Lord Norman's arm, he almost thought, for the moment, that it was a vision of Madge, called up by his intense longing for her, and he started and stepped back. Then he looked at her. The moon was behind him, and its rays, penetrating the trees, fell upon her face. He looked and saw that it was not Madge,

brown hair and large brown eyes, which were turned up to him with a mixture of astonishment, joy, and fear.

"Harry! Harry!" she breathed, glancing behind apprehensively as she spoke.

Lord Norman opened his lips to exclaim with surprise that she had mistaken him for some one else, but with a terrified gesture she laid her hand upon his lips. "Don't speak, don't speak a word!" she whispered, tremulously. "They are close behind. They are looking for you. Oh, Harry, they must not find you! I came to warn you. I—I saw your horse. God grant they may not see it—" She broke off panting, her hand pressed to her bosom.

Harry gazed at her in amazement. "My poor girl!" he began, in a low voice, but her hand went to his lips. "Not a word, Harry! They can hear you, will recognize your voice." She shuddered. "They know all; all, do you hear? It is not of myself I am thinking, though—though you have treated me cruelly. Oh, more cruelly than ever man treated woman before! For—for I trusted you, Harry; I trusted you; God help me—"

"But—but—" Lord Norman stammered helplessly.

"Hush! I will not talk of myself. There—there is no time for that. It is of you, and you only, I am thinking. Yes, Harry, for—for, I love you still!"

"There is some mistake, my good girl," Lord Norman began again; but she gripped his arm tightly, and shudderingly turned round.

"They will kill you! Harry, you must not speak. If—if they find you they will—oh, I can not tell you, I can not!" She leaned against him, shaking like a leaf in the autumn wind; and Harry, fearing that she would fall, put his arm round her to support her. She let her head fall upon his breast for a moment—but a moment only; then raised it, and, looking from side to side, went on in the same hushed and tremulous voice. "Listen, Harry. When you had gone, when you had left me—oh, how could you, Harry!—father saw me crying, and—and put questions to me. I—I think he would have guessed the truth—would have known that I loved you, and that you had deserted me—even if I had not said a word. And I did deny it while—while I could, dear!"

"Heaven and earth!" Lord Norman broke in, but once more she stopped him.

"He was furious. He swore that—that he would follow and find you, and drag you back on your knees to me—they

are his words, not mine, Harry! There is not an unkind thought in my heart toward you, though you have ruined my life and made me pray for death every hour since you left me."

She sobbed in a hushed, repressive way. "He swore that he would bring you back, or—or—" she murmured. "And when he was starting I begged him to let me come with him. I—I said I could help to find you; that you would come back if I asked you, and you would have done, Harry, wouldn't you, dear?"

"I—good Heaven!—there is some hideous mistake! If you would only listen to—" Lord Norman implored.

Her grasp tightened on his arm.

"Hush! But you must not come back, Harry, even—even for my sake." Her head drooped, then she lifted her pale, worn face again. "Harry, just as we were starting, a man rode up. Father would scarcely stop to speak to him; but the man was stern, and would not let father go until he had answered some questions. I crept down behind the fence—they were in the yard—and heard every word they spoke. Harry, the man was a superintendent of police, and he told father that he was after a famous bushranger—"

She paused for breath, but Lord Norman did not seize this opportunity of interrupting her. He was, if the truth must be told, too confused, bewildered.

"He said that a reward was offered for the man—that he had orders to take him *alive or dead!*" She put her hand to her throat, as if she were choking, then went on: "Father asked what sort of a man he was, and the superintendent described him. Harry—you can guess—you know—"

"Go on," said Lord Norman.

She raised herself on tiptoe, and put her lips close to his ear.

"It was *you!* He described you exactly! Father swore. He said that he knew you—that you had left the place—stolen away—some days ago; and—and that he, too, wanted you—alive or dead!" Her whole body shook. "I crept to the back of the house, and then came out by the front door, as if I had only just come out; and—and though I could have screamed, and my heart was beating as if it would choke me, I hid my feelings from them. I knew, dear, that your life—oh, Harry, *your life*—depended on me! So when father turned to me and said, 'What do you think of your fine gentleman now, Marv—'"

"Mary!" Lord Norman echoed. It was the name Harold Thane had so often uttered in his delirium.

"Hush! I—I pretended that I—I loved you no longer, and that I was anxious to help them find you; and they let me come with them."

She wiped the perspiration from her forehead, with a weary gesture.

"We have been on the march ever since. Yesterday they saw signs of gold-washing in a stream near here, and they have camped in hiding up the valley there, feeling sure that they had found the place where you had been, and that you would come back."

"Go on," said Harry, in a low, stern voice.

"This afternoon," she resumed, with a sigh, "I stole out of the camp by myself, feeling that if you were near I should find you before they did. Love is quicker than hate, dear! I doubled on my track so that they couldn't trace me, and—and I reached here just—just as you came in among the trees."

For a moment she paused, her hand pressed to her heart; then she went on again:

"There is not a moment to lose, Harry—not a moment! They may have followed me—may be near now. If they catch you— You must get your horse, dear, and ride for the bush. You will know where to go better than I can tell you, I dare say," she said, with a sigh. "But you must go at once. Don't think of me, Harry. I—I will give you up. I—I forgive you! I—I may not live long. Since you have gone I have felt that there was only the hope of death before me. I pray to die, Harry! Hush! I—I don't blame you—not now when you are in such danger. It—it was my fault as much as yours. You see, I loved you too well—better than my father, than God!—and—and women are always punished when they love as I did—do! Go, Harry; go to England if you can. You must not stay in Australia, for I know—I have heard the superintendent and father talking—that the police are on the watch for you on all sides!"

She let her head fall on his breast again for an instant or two, then she fumbled in her pocket and brought out a purse.

"You—you may not have money, Harry. Father says that—that—"

"Well?" said Harry, hoarsely.

He seemed to know what was coming.

—"That you stole—stole his bag of money from the old

sideboard; but—but I know that that is not true, is it, dear? You could not be a common thief!"

Lord Norman's face went white and stern as he remembered the bag of money Harold Thane had shown him on the night of his arrival. His hand gripped hers unconsciously, and she mistook the pressure for denial.

"No, dear, I know that that was not true—that they had accused you falsely, in that, at any rate. Rob father? No, no! Even the little love you once felt for me would have kept you from that. And—and I won't ask you any questions about the other things they say you have done. It—it wouldn't make any difference to me," she sighed. "I—I should have loved you all the same if I'd known it."

Lord Norman's heart ached. He could have cried out aloud.

She lifted his hand to her cheeks and kissed it, and the pathetic, heart-breaking action was the last straw.

"The scoundrell!" he burst out. She started, and still clinging to his hand, shrunk back a little.

"What—what did you say?" she faltered, her eyes fixed on him. Lord Norman took her hand firmly, and turned so that the moonlight fell on him. She started, her eyes distending with a kind of horror and amazement combined.

"Harry!" she gasped, and, bending forward, scanned his face with a frightened scrutiny. "Harry! Speak to me! Speak—one word! No! Hush! Let me look at you! Ah!" She uttered a faint scream, which she stifled with her hand on her lips, and tearing herself from his grasp, staggered back against a tree, clutching its trunk behind her to save herself from falling.

Harry approached her slowly.

"My poor girl!" he began.

She sunk to the bottom of the trunk, and, crouching, glared at him in mad terror.

"Who—who are you?" she panted. "It is—it is not Harry! Oh, God! am I mad—mad?" and she hid her face in her hands.

Lord Norman bent over her and drew her up.

"Hush!" he said, soothingly, his own voice trembling. "I—I will explain. I have tried to do so all along, or nearly all the time. I am not the man you take me for."

"No—no! I see—I see now!" she breathed, with a shudder. "But, oh, Heaven! how like, how like! Face—voice—"

"I know," said Harry, still soothingly. "I am like him."

"We are so alike as to seem brothers. But we are not, thank Heaven!" he added, under his breath.

"Then—then you know him—you know where he is?" she gasped.

Lord Norman made a gesture of assent.

"Take—take me to him!" she implored. "Take me at once!" and she rose and looked round wildly.

Lord Norman held her firmly though gently by the hand.

"Tell me his name," he whispered.

She scanned his face with fearful anxiety and doubt.

"Are you—are you a friend to him?" she panted.

"I was," he said.

His answer seemed to inspire her with his truthfulness.

"Harold Thane," she whispered. "Take me to him! Now, at once! There is not a moment to lose! His life—"

Lord Norman's grasp of her hand did not relax.

"I can not," he said. "Listen to me! Harold Thane is a scoundrel!"

She struggled to release herself.

"He is a scoundrel!" he repeated, sternly; "no good could come to you by seeing him. He is a villain, unworthy of a thought of any honest girl. You want to see him, that you may warn him and save his life. I will do that."

"You—you will?" she breathed, pushing the hair from her pale forehead with her free hand.

"Yes, I promise you," he said, in his grave, simple way.

"I will save him for your sake, though"—he paused—"but on one condition only. You must go back to your father, and think no more of Harold Thane."

"Think no more—" She smiled, a heart-breaking smile.

"I know," he said, "it is a hard thing to ask; but you must do it. Go back and lead them off the scent if you can. If you can contrive to do so for a day—a few hours—it will be something; it will give him a start."

"Yes, yes," she whispered, shaking with excitement. "And—and you promise?"

"I promise to help him to escape. I will do more—I will try and show him what a villain he was to return such love as yours with treachery; what a fool he has been to throw away a heart of gold."

The tears sprang to her eyes, so that she saw his handsome face through a mist.

"I—I know what you mean. Tell him that—that if he will only love me again and keep straight, that I will wait for

him, will go on loving him. And—and if he should send for me—”

Harry's own eyes were moist. He nodded.

“I understand; and let's hope— It is never too late to mend. If anything could make an honest man of him, such trust as yours ought to do it.”

She drew a long breath.

“He—he is not so bad as—as you think,” she breathed, her head drooping, her hands wringing each other in an agony of shame and hope. “Tell him what I have said; tell him that if it's ten—twenty years from now, and he sends for me, I—I will go to him!”

The tears were streaming from her eyes; but she dried them suddenly and looked round with a shiver of dread.

“What was that?” she panted.

“Only my horse moving,” he said. “But you must not stay here; you must go. As you say, there is not a moment to lose, and I must get him away.”

“Yes, yes,” she assented, with feverish eagerness.

She left him and went a few paces; then she came back noiselessly.

“Will—will you tell me your name?” she whispered, looking up into his face with still something of wonder and dread at his extraordinary likeness to the man whom she loved, and by whom she had been betrayed.

“Harry Richmond,” said Lord Norman. “You shall not tell me yours unless you like.”

She hesitated a moment, then she said:

“Mary Marshall.”

“I shall not forget it,” he said. “Good-bye! Go now at once. Keep to the right of the road, and the shadows will cover you for more than a mile.”

“Good-bye!” she murmured, brokenly. “You—you will remember your promise—you will be kind to him?”

With the last words she bent and touched his hand with her hot, dry lips, then glided into the shadows, and was mingled and lost in them.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER the girl had stolen away, Lord Norman walked up and down among the trees for some minutes, thinking over her story. He would have liked to have gone to the villain who had betrayed her and have handed him over to her father's justice. But he had given his promise to her, and

not only must he hold his hand from punishing the scoundrel, but must help him to get off.

It went very much against the grain, but it had to be done; and with the girl's voice ringing in his ears and filling him with indignation, he returned to the hut.

Harold Thane was asleep, lying on his back, with one arm extended behind his head, the other hanging by his side, and with both hands clinched. There was a frown on the face, which indicated that the sleeper was not free from dreams; and as Lord Norman looked down at him he noticed for the first time—that which he would probably have never noticed if he had not learned the man's true character—that there was something sinister of expression in the lines about the mouth and between the eyes.

He stood beside the sleeping man for some minutes, loath to wake him and commence the miserable scene which he knew must occur, and went outside again, and drew a long breath of distress and reluctance. Then he saddled Thane's horse, and in about a quarter of an hour returned to the hut, and going up to the rough bed, laid his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Wake up!" he said in his ear.

Harold Thane sprung up, and looked round him with a glance of terror; then, as he saw Lord Norman, sighed with relief, and smiled.

"Anything the matter?" he asked, with a frown.

"How do you feel now?" asked Lord Norman, standing over him, and looking down at him with a sternness which Thane did not observe.

"Better, first-rate, quite strong again," said Thane, cheerfully. "You've saved my life, Richmond! I'm not to call you my lord, am I? You'd make a splendid hospital nurse."

"Do you feel strong enough to go out—to take a long ride?" Lord Norman inquired.

Thane stared up at him.

"Oh, yes; if it isn't too long," he said, with a smile. "What's up? Have you?"—his voice grew cautious and eager—"have you found some more gold? Have you, Richmond? If so, you can tell me; I'm strong enough to ride a hundred miles." He rose and stretched himself, and reached for his belt.

"Sit down," said Lord Norman, "sit down and nurse your strength. You'll need it. No, I've not found any gold, Thane, but you will have to take a long ride, all the same."

Something in his voice struck Thane's attention, and he looked up at him in the mingled fire and moonlight.

"What's up?" he asked. "Why should I take a ride? You sound mysterious, Richmond, and I hate mysteries."

"So do I," said Lord Norman, "especially when a mystery serves to hide a piece of villainy."

Thane looked up curiously.

"It seems to me, from all you told me this evening, that there is more mystery about you than me, Richmond. I'm not a real live lord masquerading as a common cattle-runner."

"No, you're only a scoundrel pretending to be an honest man," said Lord Norman.

Thane snatched his revolver from his pillow, and held it ready to aim and fire.

Lord Norman shook his head.

"No use," he said. "I extracted the cartridges. I thought you might do yourself some injury during your fever."

Thane flung the revolver on the bed.

"You knew I was unarmed, or you wouldn't have insulted me," he said.

Lord Norman's eyes flashed for a moment, but he answered quietly and calmly enough:

"If, when we've had our talk out, you'd like to exchange shots," he began—then he broke off. A pretty way of performing his promise to that poor girl! "No," he said, "I don't think I can shoot you, Thane. I almost wish I could, for you deserve it."

"Oh, I do?" retorted Thane, with a curl of his lip. "You speak your mind, my Lord Norman Eldred Beauchamp Fitz-George Lechmere."

It struck Lord Norman that the man had got his numerous names with striking correctness; but the fact did not stay longer than a moment with him—at that time. In the after years it assumed an immense importance.

"Yes, it's my way," he said. "Thane, I know all about you."

Thane's face flushed, and took to itself an acute and cautious look.

"You know all about me, do you?" he said, with the same sneer. "How did you learn it? Have you been sneaking and listening to my ramblings while I've been asleep just now? You were friendly enough before you went out, or you

affairs—sacred affairs of the heart—to a scoundrel and a villain, as you politely call me.”

Lord Norman hesitated. It was a disgusting task, and he shirked it. He would have much preferred to have started the man off without a word.

“Do you know a young lady called Mary Marshall?” he inquired, sternly.

Thane started, and looked up at him with amazement and apprehension.

“No,” he said, after a slight pause.

“That is a lie!” said Lord Norman, calmly. “I have seen her and heard her story. She said her father was close at hand—”

Thane sprung to his feet and seized the empty revolver; then remembering it was empty, flung it from him with an oath, and with a white face and starting eyes looked round for some other weapon.

“Mary—her father—here! For God’s sake, save me, Richmond! Save me!”

He clasped his hands and leaned forward imploringly, his whole frame shaking. “Save me!” he whispered, hoarsely. “I—I never did you any harm, Richmond. I’ve acted on the square with you. Save me! Let me go! If—if he comes up with me, I’m—I’m a dead man!”

A shudder convulsed his handsome face, and he glided backward to the door, and, shooting the heavy bolts, set his back against it. “Richmond, tell me—tell me how she came here, where they are, what you know!”

Lord Norman looked at him with stern contempt and loathing, and yet with a faint twinge of pity. You see, the man had been almost as close as a brother to him for weeks past, and owed him his life.

“I know everything; enough, anyhow,” he said. “That poor girl has told me the whole story of your villainy. Poor girl! Thane, such men as you are not fit to live.” Then his calmness gave way suddenly, and with a ring of passionate scorn in his voice and a flash in his eyes, he went on: “You fool! You won the heart of a pure-minded, sweet, honest girl, and instead of cherishing it as the greatest treasure a man could have, you dragged it through the dirt and trampled on it!”

Thane gazed at him with mingled resentment and terror.

“She—she told you that—”

“Yes, and more. I know that her father is hunting down

the man who not only ruined his daughter's life but stole his purse!"

Thane started, and his lips twitched.

"It's—it's a lie!" he gasped.

"It's the truth! The bag you stole is in that box," said Lord Norman, sternly, pointing to the spot where his "treasure-box" was buried. "But that's a small matter compared with your villainy toward her. That's a matter for the superintendent of police, who is with her father, and who wants Harold Thane, the bushranger."

"Police?"

The white lips formed the words, the white face grew distorted with terror as he flung himself at Norman's feet.

"Richmond—Lord Norman—for Heaven's sake, don't give me up! I'm—I'm not so bad as you think. There's—there's some excuse for me. Don't give me up!"

Lord Norman, overcoming an almost irresistible desire to spurn him with his foot, said, coldly:

"You're right! I ought to give you up. I ought to help hang or shoot you, but—but I've given my promise to help you—"

"You—you promised? Promised *her*?"

"Yes," said Lord Norman, grimly. "In a weak moment I pledged my word to assist you to escape."

"God bless you!" panted Thane.

"I hope God will bless *her*," said Lord Norman, with scorn.

"You're not a fit and proper person to call down blessings on any one! Get up. Sit down—sit down there and rest—you'll need all your strength. I'll give you a quarter of an hour; the moon will have sunk by that time, or nearly so, and you will get away through the woods. I've got your horse saddled. Make straight for Port Granville."

"Port Granville?" murmured Thane, wiping the drops from his face. "Every port will be watched!"

"So Mary Marshall said," remarked Lord Norman. "You must manage to change your clothes; you'd better shave. But there, all this is a part of your profession," he broke off, calmly. "You will know what to do better than I can tell you."

As he spoke he stirred up the fire and put on the kettle and a saucepan of meat to warm.

"What are you doing?" asked Thane, hoarsely.

"Getting something for you to eat and drink," said Lord Norman, curtly.

Thane drew a long breath.

"If you knew the whole story!" he muttered.

"Thanks; but I've heard enough, and from more truthful lips than yours."

"If you knew what my life has been," Thane went on in a low, uncertain voice. "I'm not a swell like you. I wasn't born with a gold spoon in my mouth; I don't even know who my father was."

"This doesn't interest me," said Lord Norman, discouragingly, as he poked the wood into a blaze under the kettle.

"That poor girl wanted to make excuses for you—"

He broke off, and turned to look sternly at Thane.

"Look here! I think—I'm not sure—that there's one more chance in life for you. Strange as it may seem, she forgives you, and—and cares for you still."

"She—she said so?"

"Yes," said Lord Norman, grimly. "There's no accounting for women. I've heard that the worse a man is, the better some good woman loves him. I don't know much about it; but that's her lookout. I give you her message. 'Tell him,' she said, 'to make his way to England, to try and earn an honest living, and if he should ever send for me, I will go to him.'"

Thane nodded. His head was leaning upon his hands, and his eyes strayed from the back of Lord Norman's head to the door, as if he were listening with one ear to the speaker and with the other for signs of the pursuers.

"There is just a chance for you," continued Lord Norman; "take my advice and seize it. Go to England, get some honest work, and then send for her and marry her; and you'll get a better wife than many a straight man deserves—that is, if she doesn't come to her senses, and marry a man more worthy of her."

He poured out a can of tea, and put all the meat on the plate, and set them on the ground near Thane's feet.

"There you are," he said. "I'd advise you to get through as much of them as you can. Your next meal's uncertain."

Thane took up the tea and drank it feverishly.

"I can't eat."

"Put something in your pocket," said Lord Norman, coldly.

Thane held out the cup for more tea.

"And—and what will you do when I am gone—I mean if they track us to this part?"

"If," said Lord Norman. "What has that to do with you?"

Thane emitted a sullen laugh.

"You seem to have forgotten one thing," he said; "that if they come up suddenly they may take you for me—we're devilishly alike, my lord—and shoot you on sight! And if they don't make that mistake they may hold you to account for—*for helping me off.*"

"That's my business," said Lord Norman, curtly.

He went to the window and looked out at the night.

"You'd better be getting away," he said

Thane set down the cup, and put on his boots, belt, and coat; but paused as Lord Norman took the spade and began to dig. He got up the box, opened it, and took out the bags of money. From the one bag he poured all its contents, counted them into two halves, put one into the bag, into which he poured the gold-dust from the handkerchief, then handed it to Thane.

"You'll want some money," he said. "I've given you half of mine and your own dust. The bag you brought with you I return to Mary's father."

Thane bit his lip.

"You—you treat me like a dog!" he said, between his teeth.

Lord Norman deigned no response, and Thane, after looking at him for a moment, took up the empty revolver.

"Are you going to send me away unarmed?" he asked, sullenly. "If so, you might as well give me up at once."

Lord Norman took out some cartridges from his belt, and Thane eagerly held out his hand. But, as if he did not see it, Lord Norman laid them on the bed.

Thane's eyes flashed and his face reddened.

"Curse you!" he muttered, half audibly; "I'm not fit for you to touch, you—you d——d lord!"

"Time's up!" said Lord Norman, quietly.

Thane paused in his rapid operation of filling the revolver, and glared at him.

"You're a cool card!" he said, with an oath. "You forget I've got the best of you now!"

And he touched the revolver, with a smile that just showed his gleaming teeth.

"Oh, no!" said Lord Norman, coolly. "Cowards only show fight and commit murder when they think it will pay them. You are a coward, Thane, and have sense enough to know you've nothing to gain by shooting me; and also know that the sound of the firing would attract the attention of the men who are wanting you."

"It—it was only a bluff," Thane said, with a sinister

smile. "But you're wrong. I'm no coward; though you think I'm one, and everything else that's mean."

"You're right, I do," said Lord Norman. "And the sooner I'm quit of your company the better I shall be pleased."

Thane's face went white, and he bit his lip; but he made no response, and filled in the last of his cartridges. Then he went to the door, and, opening it slowly and a few inches only, peered out and listened.

"Good-bye," he said; and after a moment's hesitation he held out his hand.

"Good-bye," said Lord Norman, with a nod; but he quite ignored the outstretched hand as he had done a few moments before, and, stooping down, placed the box in the hole.

As he did so, Thane's hand fell, a fiendish expression crept over his haggard face, and he raised the revolver. But he remembered the danger, even as his finger touched the trigger, shifted the revolver to his left hand, and, stealing behind Lord Norman, caught up the spade, and brought the blade down with all his force on the back of Lord Norman's head.

Lord Norman went down upon his face like an ox in the shambles, then he rolled over, and staggering to his feet, went blindly for his assailant. The blood was streaming from the wound, the hut seemed to spin round him, he could scarcely see the man who had struck him the cowardly blow.

Thane stepped out of his way and watched him for a moment, blundering about with his great arms extended, his eyes staring wildly; then, as Lord Norman's fingers touched him, he stepped back, raised the spade again, and dealt him a second blow; this time on the side of the head.

Lord Norman went down again, and lay where he had fallen, his arms stretched out, the blood rapidly forming a pool round him.

Thane, still holding the spade, stood and looked down at his victim, his own breath coming with heavy panting, his eyes dilating. Then he flung the spade from him, and kneeling down, looked into the blood-stained face. He saw the lips twitch, and a shudder convulse the body of the prostrate man, and with a half-fearful eagerness he put his hand on Lord Norman's heart.

For one moment his own face went white to the lips.

"By God! I've killed him!" he cried, hoarsely. He rose and shrunk from him, and sunk upon the bed, but still looking at the placid, blood-stained face over his shoulder. For a

few minutes he sat as motionless as his victim—as if benumbed, body and mind; then suddenly he remembered his own danger, and made for the door, still looking behind him.

But at the door he paused.

His eyes had fallen on the box.

Stepping round the still form eagerly, he knelt down, and took out the bags that contained the remainder of Lord Norman's savings, and the stolen one. As he stowed them away in his belt-pocket, he saw the diary. He took it up mechanically, and was dropping it into the box again, when an idea—which no doubt had been, unfelt by him, forming slowly in his brain—sprung into full growth and life.

He started. A hot flush swept over his haggard, Cain-like face, and he uttered an exclamation.

"Yes, yes," he muttered, with feverish excitement, "that's it! Why shouldn't I? Let me think. Yes, it's plain as a pike-staff."

He took the diary and put it in his breast-pocket, even more carefully than he had stowed away the money. Then he knelt on one knee beside Lord Norman, and, with a hand that shook as it came in contact with the body of the man who had saved his life and helped him to escape, he drew out the small flat packet from Lord Norman's breast-pocket, and put it with the diary.

As he did so, he felt for Lord Norman's heart again, and, with a long breath, as if satisfied that his foul deed had been complete, turned to the door.

A sound behind him startled him into stopping, and he looked round.

It was only a log falling in the fire. He looked at it, looked in the upturned face lighted up by the blaze which the falling of the log had caused; then, as if struck by another idea, turned back to the fire, took up the log, and placed it near the bed, with the burning end away from the blankets, which lay in a disordered heap.

As if the last action had strained his nerves to the utmost, he sprung to the door, shut it carefully behind him, ran to where his horse stood ready saddled and bridled, and, leaping on its back, rode through the woods as if the Spirit of Murder were at his heels.

Half an hour afterward a long jet of flame from the burning log stretched out its tongue and licked the blanket.

It smoldered for a time harmlessly enough, then a whiff of air coming from under the door fanned it into a flame. Presently the rug nearest to it caught, and the hut was sud-

denly lighted by a blaze, which shed a lurid glare upon the motionless figure stretched on the floor and the white face flecked with red.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHILE these strange things were happening to Lord Norman out in Australia—the land of fleece and gold—Madge's quiet life was running its uneventful course in the usual way.

After the night of the ball, Mr. Silas Fletcher, beautifully dressed, with a great deal of jewelry about him, hovered round the cottage garden very frequently—indeed, every day, during his holiday—but he saw little of Madge, who, when she perceived his elegant form approaching, speedily retired to her own room, and shut herself up with her books and her thoughts.

And those thoughts naturally dwelt upon her long-lost lover, for whenever she looked at Mr. Fletcher she was reminded of Lord Norman: which was unfortunate for Mr. Fletcher.

While his holiday lasted, and he prowled around the place, she was almost a prisoner; and when she heard from her grandfather that Mr. Fletcher had gone back to London and the pursuit of wealth, she welcomed the announcement with as deep a sigh of relief that the old gentleman was startled.

"Any one would think you were glad, my dear," he remarked, obtusely.

"So I am, grandfather," said Madge, with a smile.

"Why?"

"Oh! never mind. I don't like Mr. Fletcher or the smell of his cigars, and the garden has seemed full of it lately."

"That is rather ungrateful," he said, absently, as he bent to tie a flower to its stick; "for Mr. Fletcher seemed very much interested in you. He was always asking me questions about your likes and dislikes."

"Oh!" said Madge, naïvely. "Did you chance to mention that one of my dislikes happened to be himself?"

The old man smiled.

"I didn't know it till now, my dear."

Madge laughed.

"Well, never mind Silas Fletcher—I suppose I ought to say 'Mr.' Silas Fletcher now he is becoming a great man. I am going down to the village to see Mrs. Bird's little girl."

She had a basket containing some invalid delicacies on her

arm, and she picked some flowers and laid them in a corner of the basket and set forth.

Of late Madge had become, in a small way, the Lady Bountiful of the place, and her lovely and lovable face was welcomed as that of a guardian angel in the laborers' cottages. The children had grown to love her, and would leave the most interesting game to cluster round her; and the men would greet her with the slow, rustic smile which, though it seems to express so little, means so much.

But for this affection, which she had won for herself, Madge's life would have been a dull and gray one, notwithstanding her perfect health and bright spirits.

The curate, a sentimental young man, and so bashful that he dared scarcely glance toward her pew in church, called her—to himself—"The angel of the homesteads," and worshiped her from afar, as only a sentimental, bashful curate can.

Mrs. Bird received her—and the basket of jelly and beef-tee—with open arms, and Madge sat beside the sick child's bed, and administered some of the jelly with her own hands; small still, but not so brown as when Lord Norman had seen them.

"Such lovely flowers, too, Miss Madge!" Mrs. Bird exclaimed, as Madge arranged them in a cracked jug and placed them within sight of the child's large, wistful eyes. "Did they come out of the great gardens, miss?"

"Oh, no," said Madge; "these are only some simple autumn stock and chrysanthemums from my own small garden at the cottage. I never go into the great gardens, you know."

"To be sure, miss; so Bird has told me. Bird sometimes works in the grounds. What a waste them gardens must be, miss," she went on.

"A waste?"

"Yes, miss; no one sees them, do they? The earl never has no company, and don't leave the house himself, as Bird tells me. Ah, miss, I don't envy him, for all his money and grandeur."

Madge made no response as she leaned over the child and gently smoothed her hair from its hot forehead; but Mrs. Bird, not discouraged by her silence, went on:

"They say that the earl is breaking fast, miss. He hasn't been seen outside the park gates since the night of the ball. Ah, miss, we know who was the belle that night!" She broke off to remark with an archly admiring glance at Madge's face.

"Bird says—he was helping to wait, you know, miss—that all the gentlemen, and the ladies, too, for that matter, were talking about you—"

"Oh, please, Mrs. Bird!" Madge remonstrated, with a laugh.

"It's true, miss. They were all agreed—at least, most of them, for, to be truthful, there were some that was took with Lady Sybil; the fair young lady, you know, miss, Lady Delamoore's daughter."

"I know," said Madge. "I remember her very well, Mrs. Bird. Yes, she is very beautiful! And those persons who compared her with me were very foolish, and possessors of singularly bad taste."

"Oh, it's of no use talking, miss," Mrs. Bird cut in, emphatically.

"I don't think it is," laughed Madge, desirous of changing the subject. "Does the doctor think little Emily will be up soon?"

"Well, yes, miss. But he hasn't seen her lately. You see, we don't like him to come often, because of the bill. It's hard enough as it is to make both ends meet, and Mr. Fletcher have rose our rent a shilling a week. He said Bird wasn't paying enough. I see Mr. Fletcher himself, and begged hard to be let off the extra money; but he said he wouldn't hear of it. He said that it was his duty to get as much out of the estate as he could, and so he was raising the rents all round. I should have thought that the earl had got too much money already to want to take another shilling out of such poor folks as us. What's the use of him a-doing it when he hasn't chick or child, and the title and the estates will have to go to a distant branch; scarcely his kith and kin, as you may say."

Madge was silent, and Mrs. Bird went on with that eagerness to talk of the private affairs of her betters which is so common with her class. "Speaking of that, Miss Madge, Bird says as there's something dark and mysterious about the way his young lordship disappeared. It's young Lord Norman I'm meaning, miss. He was here some four or five years ago. Perhaps you don't remember. I don't suppose you saw him."

"Yes, I remember," said Madge, turning to the window, so that her face was hidden.

"Well, miss, he was the heir, you know, and his uncle sent for him to pay him a visit, and after he'd been back only a few days he disappeared, and no one's ever heard anything of him since. I've heard that there was a quarrel between

him and the earl, and that the earl struck him. Anyway, the poor boy disappeared that night, and though the earl and Mr. Fletcher went after him, and searched everywhere, he was never seen again. Poor boy! perhaps he's wandering about half starved—or, like as not"—her voice fell—"he's dead!"

Madge's hands, as they touched the flowers, trembled.

"And that's what I think has happened, miss," Mrs. Bird continued. "Because, you see, if he was alive, he'd be a man by this time, and would be thinking that his uncle was an old man, and that he was very near coming into his own. Lor', miss, how pale you look!" She broke off as Madge turned from the window. "You do too much, Miss Madge, dear, running about the village and tiring yourself, looking after us poor folk."

"No, no; I'm not tired, indeed," said Madge. "Good-bye, Emily; good-bye, Mrs. Bird. I will see whether anything can be done about the extra shilling a week. Perhaps Mr. Fletcher will let me speak to him about it; but if he will not, well—" The smile, which served instead of words, was fully understood by Mrs. Bird, and Madge left the cottage followed by the woman's grateful, "God bless you, dear Miss Madge!"

As she walked homeward, her heart throbbed painfully with the dread which the woman's garrulous talk had aroused. Dead! The thought made her face pale, and stabbed her for a moment with a sharp thrust; but she refused to harbor it.

"No, no," she murmured. "He is not dead. I—I feel that I should know it if he were!"

When she entered the cottage garden she saw Fletcher, the steward, just coming in by the gate leading to the front gardens, and with a sudden courage she attacked him at once.

"Oh, Mr. Fletcher, I am so glad to see you! I have just been to the Birds', and Mrs. Bird tells me that—that you have been obliged to raise the rent—"

—"And that she can't afford to pay it," he said, in his grating voice, his lips parting and showing his yellow tusks. "I know that whining; don't they all sing the same song? Miss Madge, you've taught 'em to sing it! You will teach them all to be paupers, and to snarl at and abuse their masters."

The color deepened in Madge's face, and her eyes darkened and began to flash.

"That is not true, Mr. Fletcher; but we will let it pass. What I wanted to say was, that the Birds had had a long

illness—little Emily, you know—and that it has thrown them back, and made it harder for them to pay their way. Surely”—there was a touch of scorn in her voice—“the earl does not need this shilling a week so badly. He will not miss it if you take it off again.”

Fletcher scowled at her angrily.

“Let me advise you to mind your own business, and leave me and the people on the estate to mind ours,” he said. “If Bird can not pay, he is welcome to go. There are plenty to step into his place, and be glad to do so.”

Madge’s eyes flashed outright at this, and she opened her lips to utter an indignant retort, when she saw a tall figure in a fur cloak standing by the gate behind Fletcher. It was the earl, and at sight of him she turned and would have entered the cottage, but he raised his hand, as if commanding her to stay, and, opening the gate, entered her garden, and came slowly toward them.

Fletcher heard the step, and looked over his shoulder.

“My lord—” he began, with a change of countenance; but the earl, with his eyes still fixed on Madge, signed to him to leave them, and Fletcher left the garden.

The earl stood leaning on his stick, and looking at Madge. Although it was October, the weather was mild, but he had his fur coat buttoned closely, and shivered slightly at a faint breeze.

Madge stood for what seemed an unconscionable time under his silent regard; and, as it appeared to her by the expression of his face that he had forgotten her presence, she was about to move toward the cottage, when he said in a low, though clear and metallic voice:

“You are Gordon’s granddaughter?”

“Yes, my lord,” said Madge.

He went to the seat on which Lord Norman had sat, and sunk down—as he did so, Madge was conscious of an unpleasant thrill—and, leaning his arms on his stick, and his chin on his arms, he stared at her with his fierce eyes.

“What is your name?”

“Madge,” she replied.

“And so you think I am a tyrant and oppressor, Miss Gordon, eh?” he said, not angrily, but with a kind of cold amusement at her embarrassment.

She raised her downcast eyes and looked at him fearlessly—as fearlessly as Lord Norman had looked at him—and, strangely enough, her expression reminded him of the boy.

"My lord—" she began; but he stopped her with a gesture of his long, white hand.

"Don't trouble to explain. I heard every word from the other side of the hedge. You didn't plead your cause well, my girl. You should have been more respectful, whined a little, treated Fletcher as if he were a great man—greater and more powerful than his master."

He smiled sardonically; then scanning her face keenly, went on in a different tone:

"But you don't look as if you could use that kind of advocacy—as if you had not learned to whine and bend the knee."

A smile passed over Madge's face.

"I hope not," she said. Then she added, quietly: "But if Mr. Fletcher wanted me to whine, you do not require me to do so, my lord? These poor people—"

He waved his hand again, and interrupted her.

—"Do not interest me in the least: you do. And as you do, they shall have this addition to their rent remitted."

Madge's face lighted up with pleasure.

"Thank you, my lord," she said, simply. "They will be very grateful."

"Let them be—to you," he said, laconically.

He was silent for a moment, staring at her lovely face absently; then he said:

"Why, have I not seen you before? But I have met you somewhere. Where was it? Yes, I remember—at that cursed ball. I beg your pardon," he apologized, with grim courtesy; "you found it delightful enough, no doubt. They tell me you were winner of the palm." He smiled, and his fierce eyes flashed with amusement at her sudden blush. "And so," he went on, after a pause, "you play the part of my Lady Charitable among my people, eh, child? I suppose they abuse me roundly—call me a miser and a skinflint?" He laughed sardonically.

Madge did not contradict him. As she looked at and listened to him she remembered that it was he who had driven Lord Norman out into the world helpless and friendless, and her heart was filled with anger against him.

"And you agree with them, I see," he said, scanning her face. "Well, let them think of me as they please; but you—" He paused, and his eyes seemed to look beyond her vacantly, and his mind seemed to wander. His lips moved for a time without any sound coming from them. Then Madge heard him murmur:

"Behold! your house is left unto you desolate—desolate!"

Notwithstanding her repugnance to him, Madge, being a woman, and tender-hearted, could not help feeling something like pity, so unutterably wretched was his tone, so eloquent of loneliness and remorse the expression of his face.

She was turning away, when he looked up, and starting slightly, passed his hand across his brow, as if to remove the cloud of bitter memories that had suddenly obscured his vision.

"Wait," he said, in a low voice. "Don't be too quick to judge, child. What do you know of men and the world that you should presume to pass sentence? As for these grievances, I know nothing, hear nothing of them. Fletcher, my steward, transacts all the business of the estate. I know nothing. I repeat— Well?"

For Madge had opened her lips as if about to speak, then checked herself.

"Speak out, child. Don't be afraid."

"I am not afraid, my lord," she said. "I was going to say that that was no excuse. They are your people, not Mr. Fletcher's; that you get the money wrung from them. It is your duty to protect them—"

His thick, dark brows came down over his eyes, and he looked up at her beautiful face for a moment, then his eyes fell.

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," he muttered. Then aloud, he said: "You have plenty of courage, Miss Gordon; you are the first person who has ventured to lecture me on my duty. Stay! I am not angry, strange to say. The truth from a stranger's lips is so novel that it loses its sting. You are right, no doubt. It may be my duty to play the part of protector and friend to the people, but"—he sighed heavily—"I am too old, too weary, too desolate, to care what becomes of them or myself. Why should I trouble? I am a lonely man weary of my life!"

"Why are you alone?" asked Madge, with a sudden passion. "Where is your nephew, Lord Norman?"

Her retort and the question had sprung from her lips suddenly, on the impulse of the moment, and its audacity startled herself. Its effect upon him was more than startling. He rose, letting his stick fall from his hands, and confronted her.

"Norman! Norman!" he repeated, hoarsely. "What do you know of him? When did you see him? What—what—"

Madge, pale and trembling, stood with downcast eyes.

"What do you know?" he demanded. "I insist upon an answer."

"I—I know that he fled years ago in consequence of your ill-treatment, my lord," she faltered, in a low voice. "If you are weary and desolate, it is through your own fault. If you had not driven him away he would have been here by your side. Oh! my lord," her voice broke, "find him! He is not dead. I am sure—sure that he is not dead. Find him!"

The earl sunk on to the seat, trembling. Madge stooped and picked up the stick, and as he took it in his hand fell on her arm.

"No, you do not lack courage!" he said, in a low voice. "You say you know—what do you know? Idle rumors! Anything more? How did I ill-treat the lad? I tried to secure his happiness, his welfare. A blow? What is that to a school-boy? Find him? How can I find him? Did I not search for him everywhere?"

He was silent a moment, still trembling; then he rose.

"Find him?" he muttered. "Yes! You are right. He shall be found!"

There was the ring of a sudden resolution in his voice, a strange light in his eyes.

"Come with me!" he said.

Madge drew back slightly, but he held her arm.

"No, no," he said, with a grim smile. "It was your idea, not mine; the responsibility rests with me. Come, I've yielded to you in the matter of those—what's their names?—people; it is your turn now," and he smiled slightly. "Come with me; we will see Fletcher—we will—" He stopped and put his hand to his brow, and staggered slightly. "I have not been well," he murmured. "Tut! tell the truth! I am old and feeble. Give me your arm, child."

CHAPTER XIV.

SCARCELY knowing whether she was awake or dreaming, Madge drew his long, lean hand within her arm, and they passed through the gate into the great gardens. She looked around curiously, and he noticed it, absorbed as he seemed to be.

"Have you never been here before this?" he asked.

"No, my lord," she replied.

"Strange!" he said. "Gordon has hidden you very well. And you say you saw my nephew Norman: did you?"

"Yes," Madge replied, in a low voice.

"He was a fine lad," he muttered, as if to himself. "A true Chesney. I—I wish I hadn't struck him. But he was a fool. I had only his welfare at heart. And so you think I may find him? Perhaps—perhaps. We shall see. Do I lean too heavily on you, child?"

"No, my lord," she replied.

They crossed the lawn and entered the house. At another time Madge might have noticed and been impressed by the vastness of the hall and the grandeur of the whole place; but she was too engrossed and excited by the novelty of the situation to notice much.

"Come into the library," said the earl. "This way."

He sunk into a chair and leaned his head on his hands for a moment or two, then rose, courteously led her to a seat, and rang a bell.

"Send up Mr. Fletcher," he said to the footman who entered.

"See now," he said to Madge, "I am losing no time, am I? Fletcher will make all sorts of obstacles, but we will override them. You shall have your way."

As he spoke, the door opened and Fletcher entered. He started at sight of Madge seated close beside the earl, but recovered his presence of mind instantly.

"Fletcher," said the earl, "this is Miss Gordon."

Fletcher inclined his head and showed his fangs.

"She has been telling me about those persons whose rent you have raised. What is their name?"

"Bird," said Madge, in a low voice.

"Let them pay the same rent as heretofore. No words! Let it be so. And, Fletcher, there is something else. I want to find Lord Norman."

Fletcher started.

"Find Lord Norman, my lord?" he said, glancing from the earl to Madge in amazement.

"Yes!" and he struck the table with his clinched fist. "I want to find him at once."

He turned his restless eyes on to Madge.

"What shall we do, child? Come, it is your idea, not mine."

Madge thought a moment.

"Advertise for him," she said, in a low voice.

The earl nodded.

"Right! Advertise for him! You hear, Fletcher?"

Fletcher looked from one to the other with a keen scrutiny.

"But that has been done, my lord," he said.

"Not for some time—years ago," said the earl. "Advertise again. Draw up the form now—this moment." He pointed to the paper and ink imperiously.

Fletcher sat down at the other side of the table and took up a pen, but looked round irresolutely.

"Come!" said the earl to Madge, "tell him what to say."

Madge, with a faint blush, raised her head. She seemed inspired by courage.

"Norman," she dictated. "All shall be forgiven. Come to the Chase at once."

"Write that down!" commanded the earl. "Write it down, word for word."

Old Fletcher, with closely compressed lips, obeyed.

"Insert that in the English and Continental papers."

"But, my lord—" began Fletcher.

The earl rose, and signaled to him to withdraw.

"Do as you are told, my good Fletcher," he said.

Then as the steward left the room, he held out his hand to Madge.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, in a low voice.

"Good," he said. "We will wait, you and I, for it is your idea. If he is not dead—and you are sure he is not—?"

Madge felt herself growing pale.

"I am sure, my lord."

"I don't see how you can be; but no matter. If he is not dead, he may see these advertisements and answer them. 'Your house is left unto you desolate,'" he murmured, as if he had forgotten her presence, then he took her hand. "Let us see more of each other," he said. "I will come and see your grandfather at the cottage."

"Yes, my lord," she responded.

She left him sitting in his chair, overwrought and exhausted, and went home. Her brain was in a whirl. It all seemed like a dream, and yet, through it all, she dared to hope Lord Norman would see the advertisement and come home. She should see him again! Would he remember her?

She said nothing to her grandfather. Why should she trouble him? Just at this time he was busy with his botanical work on the classification of flowers, and the small-est interruption annoyed and worried him.

The next day she spent, as usual, visiting the sick and playing "the Lady Charitable," as the earl had phrased it. But on the second day, on her return from the village, she found him sitting on the garden bench and awaiting her.

"Where have you been?" he asked, almost testily. "[I have been waiting for you."

"I have been to the village, my lord," she replied.

"There is no news of him," he said, after a pause, during which his fierce eyes had been fixed on her face.

"There has been no time, my lord," she said.

He sighed.

"Ah, no; I suppose not."

He sat looking at her, beyond her, for a full minute; then, without a word, he rose and passed through the gate.

Each day for a week he came to the small garden, and each day it was "no news;" but one day Madge found him in his seal-skin coat, pacing to and fro in feverish excitement. He waved a letter in his hand as she approached, and sinking on to the bench, laughed with a mixture of triumph and embarrassment.

"You were right!" he exclaimed; "you were right! He has been found!"

"Norman!" escaped her lips, suddenly tremulous.

"Yes; my nephew Norman, my heir, the next earl. See here!" and he held out the sheet of paper.

Madge took it, but for a moment her eyes refused to see; she was stricken with sudden blindness.

"Read it—read it!" ejaculated the earl.

She passed her hand over her suddenly dimmed eyes, then read:

"MY LORD,—I have seen your advertisement, and I hope to reach Chesney Chase on Tuesday next.

"LECHMERE."

There was no date, no address-heading.

Madge let the note fall into her lap, and sat looking straight before her, with a fast-beating heart. The earl took up the note and patted her arm.

"You were right, after all," he said, trying to speak calmly, but with obviously suppressed excitement. "It is singular, most singular. We have advertised before; we advertised soon after he ran away, and a year later. I wonder where he has been hiding? Tuesday. This is Saturday. I wonder what time he will come? By the mail, I expect. He would get here by dinner-time. He must have altered, of course. He was only a lad; he is a man now. Tuesday!"

He was silent for a minute or so, during which Madge tried to realize that Lord Norman was actually coming home, that she should see him again.

"Tuesday," said the earl, as if to himself. "There must be some one to meet him." He laughed grimly. "A killing of the fatted calf. Child," he turned to Madge, "you must be there to receive him."

"I? Oh, no, my lord!" Madge faltered.

"Yes, yes!" he said, sharply. "But for you, he would not have been found. You shall be there; and I will get Maude—I mean Lady Delamoor and Sybil." He smiled thoughtfully. "He may change his mind, now that he is a man. It was a piece of boyish obstinacy and folly—nothing more. I was hard—too hard—with him. Sybil! We shall see. Yes, all will come right."

He looked up and round the gardens in a confused fashion, then pressed his hand to his forehead.

"Did he say Tuesday, child?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Madge.

"Yes, yes! And you will be there to meet him?"

"If you wish it," she assented, in a low voice.

"I do—I do," he said.

At this moment Mr. Gordon entered the garden. The earl called to him.

"Come here, Gordon."

The old gentleman stopped, and looked from one to the other with mild surprise.

"Gordon, my nephew Norman is coming home. He has been traveling round the world, you know. They take longer for it now than we used to do, and he has been away some time. But he is coming back on Tuesday. Gordon, I want your little girl"—he put his hand on Madge's arm as if she were indeed a child—"to come up to the house and dine that night. It will seem dull and lonely to a young man if I am all alone there. I will ask Lady Delamoor and Sybil—"

He ran off into an unintelligible murmur.

Mr. Gordon looked surprised and slightly troubled, and his eyes sought Madge's, but hers were downcast; so finding no guidance there, he blinked helplessly at the earl.

"Madge is not accustomed, my lord—" he began.

The earl looked up absently, and when he had comprehended, waved his hand with the old imperious gesture.

"She must come," he said. "It is she who has found him. She shall be there to welcome him." He got up, his thick brows moving spasmodically. "There is no time to lose. I must send the invitation at once. Maude, Sybil—"

And still muttering under his breath, he left the garden.

The next day the whole place was in a state of excitement.

The long-missing Lord Norman, the heir to the Chase, was coming home. Men and women talked of nothing else, and groups gathered in the village street and filled the ale-houses, discussing the news. What would the young man—whom some few had seen on his visit to the Chase and remembered—be like? Where had he been, and was he coming back to stay?

And the excitement was not confined to the village folk, but shared by the neighboring gentry, for the earl had not confined his invitations to Lady Delamoor and Sybil, but had also asked several of the other county families. "To meet my nephew, Lord Lechmere," his note had said, and no invitation had ever created so much excitement in the locality.

There was some talk among the laborers of erecting a floral arch, but Fletcher put a stop to the idea.

"We don't know how long he'll stay," he said, with a grin to one of the tenants. "You and your arch would look awkward if he and the earl quarreled in half an hour, and he was sent about his business again. Better wait and see how the wind blows."

Lady Delamoor, at The Towers, twelve miles off, received the invitation and intimation of Lord Norman's unexpected return with languid surprise.

"There is some news for you, Sybil," she said, tossing the note to Lady Sybil, who was lying on a couch beside the fire, a feathered screen waving to and fro in her white, bejeweled hand.

A faint flush rose to the girl's delicately fair face.

"I suppose you will go, mamma?" she said, after she had read the note twice.

"Yes; oh, yes," replied Lady Delamoor, looking at the fire for a moment. Then she raised her eyes to Sybil's face thoughtfully.

"You remember him, I suppose, dear?" she said.

"Oh, perfectly," replied Sybil. "It would be very strange if I had forgotten him." The blue eyes flashed.

Lady Delamoor twisted the note in her fingers.

"I—wonder if he is married?" she said, softly.

Lady Sybil smiled scornfully.

"Very probably," she said.

"He is very young yet," remarked Lady Delamoor.

Lady Sybil shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't young men who run away and hide themselves in the colonies, or wherever it is they go, always marry? And isn't it always some servant-maid or negress? You may be sure he is married, mamma."

Lady Delamoore leaned back, and surveyed the fire with half-closed eyes.

"I—don't know. He may not be; and if he is not—"

Lady Sybil did not affect ignorance of her meaning.

"We shall see, mamma," she said.

When the Tuesday arrived—and it came at times quickly and at others slowly for Madge—she put on the pretty dress she had worn at the harvest ball, and, accompanied as far as the hall by her grandfather, reached the Chase as the clock struck eight.

The hall was flooded with light; the servants were in full livery, carriages were coming up the drive round to the stables; an air of excitement and unwonted stir and bustle throbbed through the whole place.

Madge's heart beat fast, and she longed to turn back, but her grandfather encouraged her with a whispered word or two as he left her.

"Don't be frightened, my dear. It will soon be over."

As she entered the hall Madge saw some of the ladies who had spoken to her at the ball, and Lady Ferndale extended her hand and smiled kindly.

"How do you do, Miss Gordon?" she said.

Before Madge could return the greeting the earl came forward. He was in evening-dress, and carried his usually bent form straight and proudly. There was a light in his eyes and a flush on his thin, worn cheek which made him look ten years younger than he had done a week ago.

"Ah, child!" he said, putting his hand on her shoulder, "you have come."

Then he seemed to remember that they were not alone, and that a more formal greeting was due to her. He took her hand and led her to Lady Landon.

"This is Mr. Gordon's granddaughter," he said. "She has come with the rest of you to welcome the prodigal home."

Lady Landon saw at a glance that Madge was nervous, and said those kind words which women of her age and station can use so well when they like, and as they moved into the drawing-room, the color which had left Madge's cheek stole back again.

There were about a score of persons in the magnificent room, and Madge's eyes were for a moment or two dazzled by the brilliancy of the decorations and the dresses; but presently she could look around observantly. With something like a pang she saw that Lord Norman was not there.

Lady Delamoor and her daughter entered. Madge instinctively shrunk back, for the fair girl's haughty, languid glance seemed to rest upon her with a scornful kind of wonder, as if she had exclaimed: "How dare you breathe the same air as I?"

The earl bent over Lady Delamoor's hand.

"It is good of you to come, Maude," he said, in an undertone; "and you, Sybil."

"It was good of you to ask us," murmured Lady Delamoor in her dulcet tones. She looked round, smiling and bowing to the others. "Has Lord Lechmere arrived yet?"

"Not yet," he said, quite calmly, as he offered her his arm.

"It is uncertain when he will arrive. We will not wait for him."

A young squire took Madge in to dinner, and she found herself seated near the bottom of the table. It was the first time she had been at a dinner-party—to say nothing of a dinner-party at Chesney Chase—but the nervous thrill that ran through her was not caused by the unaccustomed splendor of her surroundings, or the rank and brilliance of the company. Indeed, she scarcely saw the room—the faces appeared through a mist, and the voices sounded as if from a distance. She was thinking of Lord Norman.

A vacant place had been left. It was next to Lady Sybil's chair, and Madge could not take her eyes off it. The earl, his tall figure almost as erect as an arrow, said grace, the dinner commenced. The party talked and behaved as if it were only an ordinary dinner-party; but as the courses appeared and disappeared, glances were cast at the vacant chair, and then at the stately old man at the head of the table, and some of the glances expressed pity and commiseration.

The earl seemed unmoved by anger or disappointment, and talked with one and the other in a natural and unconstrained fashion; but Madge saw that the lines on his face were growing deeper and that the thick brows were getting lower over his fierce eyes.

The conversation began to lag, and presently there fell one of those silences which are rendered more intense by contrast with the previous talk and laughter. The earl looked up and down the table with a grim smile on his face.

"My nephew is late," he said, in a voice heard by all. "I regret—"

As he spoke, the door opened, and the butler, with a tremor of excitement in his voice, said:

"Lord Lechmere!"

And every eye turned toward the door.

CHAPTER XV.

"LORD LECHMERE!"

Every eye was turned upon him; no one spoke. They saw a young man, exceedingly handsome, with flashing eyes and crisp, wavy hair, tawny mustache, and the straight Chesney nose. He was in evening-dress, and wore it with something more than the usual ease. The handsome face looked tanned above the expanse of shirt-front, and his hands were thin and sinewy, and also sun-browned; but they were aristocratic-looking hands, and matched the face and erect, almost soldierly, bearing.

He, too, said nothing, but stood looking from face to face with a singularly alert expression, which yet had something of reserve in it. His eyes met the fixed gaze of the earl's, and rested there, and he came forward and held out his hand.

"How do you do, sir?" he said, and as he spoke every one detected the resemblance of his voice to the earl's. It had the peculiar Chesney ring in it which all there knew so well.

The earl, clutching the arms of his chair, rose and held out his hand.

"Norman!" he said, in a low, deep voice.

The young man smiled and grasped the hand.

"I was half afraid you would not know me, sir," he said, pleasantly. "Five or six years make a difference, you know, and I suppose I am very much altered."

As he spoke he looked round the table with a kind of covert scrutiny, and waited.

The earl sunk into his chair, and motioned Lord Norman to the vacant one.

"You are late," he said.

"Yes, I am very sorry," responded the young man, with perfect but respectful ease. "I had some business to do in London which kept me till the midday train. I am very glad you have not waited."

A footman brought in some soup, the butler hovered over him with the wine.

"Hock, please," he said, just as if he had been in the habit of dining there for the last five years; and he took a spoonful or two of soup, then looked round with a smile.

"I hope Lady Delamoor has not forgotten me, nor Lady Sybil, either," he said, and he bowed slightly to them.

Lady Delamoor had been looking at him steadily, but not nearly so steadily as Lady Sybil.

"You have altered a great deal, Lord Norman," said the elderly lady, still regarding him.

He laughed softly.

"Yes! When you saw me last I was a boy, and I am afraid behaved like a very stupid and boorish boy." He looked at Lady Sybil significantly as he spoke, and a faint flush rose to her face; but she cast down her eyes and said nothing.

"Is there any one else here whom you remember?" asked the earl, and his voice seemed a deep echo of the younger man's. Lord Norman set down his wine-glass and looked round with a smile of pleasant scrutiny.

Madge raised her eyes and followed him.

She was pale to the lips. A storm of varied and discordant emotions was raging within her heart. The day to which she had looked forward all these long years had arrived. Lord Norman, her boy-lover, to whom she had plighted her troth, had returned. She could not see him, hear him. She watched him. Surely her heart, her soul, should have been overwhelmed with a tumultuous joy! She, like the rest, had started at the sound of his name, had fixed her eyes upon him. She had remarked his handsome face, his deep, flashing eyes, the wavy hair, as the other had done; but the sight of him had not filled her with delight and joy, with solemn thankfulness that he had indeed returned.

Instead, in that moment when her eyes had taken in every feature, something—something indefinable, which was not wholly disappointment, or dread, or doubt, but a mixture of all three—had struck a chill to her heart and sent the upspringing gladness ebbing back again.

What was it? Here he was—the glass of fashion and the mold of form!—the frank-faced boy developed into the handsome, stalwart man, possessed of a strong man's grace, a well-bred man's ease, of pleasant voice and manner and style. Surely, surely she should be glad, and full of exquisite pleasure!

But she was not. And the fact that she was not filled her with something like shame and remorse. But this shame and remorse changed into pained surprise as she saw that his first glance when it fell upon her as he stood at the door had no sign of recognition in it.

Her heart throbbed with disappointment and wounded love. Why, she had recognized him in a moment! She would have

recognised him if they had not met for twenty years instead of five.

"Perhaps it was in the confusion of the moment—perhaps, coming into all this light, he can scarcely see faces plainly," she said to herself, and tried to find some comfort in the explanation. But when the earl had asked him if there was any one else he knew, and the handsome eyes rested on her face and then passed it by as if they had never seen it before, it was as if a cold hand had gripped her heart. She looked him full in the face for a moment, then cast down her eyes.

"I am afraid there is no one else whom I remember," he said, while all waited, watching him with intense but politely veiled curiosity.

The earl waved his hand in courtly introduction.

"This is Lady Ferndale, and this is Lady Lynne, of the Grange."

He went through the guests until he came to Madge; then he said: "And this is Miss Gordon, the granddaughter of the famous botanist, who is pleased to call himself my head gardener."

Lord Norman had bowed with a smile to each of the persons to whom he had been introduced, with most polished ease; but when the earl came to Madge, a quick, subtle change swept over the young man's face. His eyes seemed to darken, his nostrils contracted, and the well-cut lips twitched slightly.

"Miss Gordon and I are old friends, sir," he said, in a low voice, and with a smile that curved his lips but did not shine in his eyes, which were fixed, not on Madge's face, but just below it.

The earl bent his brows.

"I did not know that," he said.

There was an intense silence.

"No; and I am afraid Miss Gordon has quite forgotten what, after all, was only a slight acquaintance," said Lord Norman, with a low bow and a deepening of the smile. "But, of course, I have not forgotten. Miss Gordon has changed a great deal;" and his eyes flashed with a bold admiration which brought no pleasure to Madge, and only increased the vague disappointment, regret, doubt—whatever it was.

It was not so that her frank, true-hearted boy-lover had looked at her as he clung to the trellis below her window, and bid her "Good-bye" that never-to-be-forgotten night. Changed? Yes, indeed he was changed!

She said nothing, and no blush came to color the pallor of

her face. Lady Ferndale saw that she was painfully embarrassed, and drew attention away from her by asking Lord Norman if he had been long in London.

"Not very," he replied, promptly, and as if glad to change the subject; "only a little more than a week."

"You have a whole budget of adventures to relate, no doubt," said Lady Delamoor.

He smiled, showing his white, even teeth under the tawny mustache.

"A tremendous budget," he said. "And I hope to tell you—and Lady Sybil—some of them some day, Lady Delamoor."

His eyes sought and rested on Lady Sybil's face with the same expression of admiration which they had worn when he had looked at Madge. But Lady Sybil did not look down. She met the look with a smile.

"I love adventures," she said, in her soft, slow voice, "and I like hearing about them. It is too much trouble to read them."

"You must write a book, all the same, Lord Norman," remarked Lord Landon, pleasantly. "Everybody writes a book of his travels nowadays."

The conversation became general, and Lord Norman bore his part in it when he could, and when he could not, listened with that air of interest which is one of the hall-marks of good breeding.

Now, when he was silent and listening, his face was not nearly so pleasant-looking as when he was talking and smiling. It was difficult to say in what subtle expression the difference lay, but there was. The face, in repose, seemed, perhaps, too thoughtful for so young a man; a couple of thin lines appeared at the corners of the mouth, the handsome eyes had a weary, watchful, and a kind of inner gaze, as if he were listening and looking at other than the person who spoke, and as if he were doing so covertly.

The earl leaned back in his chair, and watched the returned prodigal intently with profound thoughtfulness. When Lord Norman spoke he leaned forward very slightly as if he were waiting for and noting some familiar accent; then, when Lord Norman was silent, he fell back and peered at him from under his thick brows.

"You have spent a great deal of your time abroad, I suppose?" said Lady Delamoor, during a pause in the conversation.

Every one was silent, waiting for the answer, and some felt that the question was an awkward one.

But Lord Norman answered without the slightest reserve:

"Yes, all the time since"—he glanced at the earl—"since I have been away—I have been in Australia."

"In Australia?" said Lady Lynne. "My husband knows that country well."

Lord Norman glanced at Sir Neville Lynne with a smile.

"Yes; a great many persons go there now, just as they used to go to Paris and the Rhine."

"Oh, mine wasn't a pleasure trip," said Sir Neville, laughing. "I went out gold digging."

Lord Norman nodded.

"I have done a little in that way." He raised his wine-glass, and looked over at Madge. "*I went out to make my fortune*, and, of course I tried the gold business among other things. But fortunes are not so easily made nowadays. I have been digger, cattle-runner—stone-breaker, even," and he laughed the musical laugh which was a bright echo of the earl's grim one.

"How interesting!" murmured Lady Sybil, leaning forward, her snowy arms gleaming softly in the subdued light of the big candelabra, her eyes shining as blue and brightly as the turquoises and diamonds in her rings and bracelets. "Pray tell us something about it, Lord Norman."

He looked round with a faint smile, an air of candor and modesty which became him very well.

"Oh, there isn't much to tell—I mean out of the usual. Every one knows the experiences of the soldier of fortune in a strange land. I have had a pretty hard time of it, as most young men have who try to earn their living without any special knowledge. Australia's not a bad place—to visit for, say, a twelvemonth, with plenty of money in your pocket. But," he shrugged his shoulders, "if you haven't the money, you'd better stop at home. You are much less likely to starve."

Lady Sybil uttered a faint cry of delighted interest.

"Oh, do you mean to say that you have been nearly starved, Lord Norman?" she breathed.

His clean-cut lips grew straight and somewhat hard, and he looked at her fixedly for a moment.

"Indeed, I do," he said, with rather a forced laugh. "I have been uncomfortably near death several times; and"—he went on as if with a man's natural reluctance to talk about himself—"and by other means as well as starvation."

"Oh, you must tell us! He may, may he not, Lord Chesney?" murmured Lady Sybil.

Madge sat and held her breath. The earl looked up as he heard his name, and saw the pallor of her face. With his own hand he filled her wine-glass before he replied to Lady Sybil.

"He may tell you anything he pleases, Lady Sybil," he said, glancing from one to the other, then dropping back with compressed lips.

Lord Norman emptied his wine-glass; the butler had kept it well filled, and the wine, a champagne of rare vintage, had brought a slight glitter to the young man's eyes.

"I'll give you one instance," he said, selecting a nut as he poked and cracking it—not with the nut-crackers, but with his hands. They all noticed the action. "Of course, I've gone through the usual perils by flood and field, such as being nearly drowned while crossing a swollen river, and getting a nasty wound in a free fight. They are all in the day's work, and happen so frequently as to grow quite commonplace—"

"Oh!" murmured Lady Sybil, with rapt interest.

He glanced around the table, then fixed his eyes on her.

"But the closest shave I had was when I was cattle-running with a chum; a man I thought I could have sworn by; a man I would have trusted with my life. I *did* trust him!"

The whole company were listening intently, but none so intently as Madge. She raised her eyes and looked at him, expecting, fondly hoping, that his eyes would seek hers, if only for a moment; but he was still looking fixedly at Lady Sybil and addressing her.

"And did he prove a false friend?" she asked.

"He did," said Lord Norman, with a strange laugh, a mirthless laugh with a sharp ring in it. "He and I were alone together in a hut in a wild place—an out-station"—he glanced at Lord Landon. "Perhaps you know—you have read about it in the papers?" he said, suddenly.

Lord Landon shook his head.

"I rarely see an Australian newspaper," he replied.

Lord Lechmere drew a slight breath—almost, it seemed, of relief.

"No? Well, we were alone together at this place, had been absolutely alone for—for weeks—like brothers, you know—sharing our meals and our work, and trusting each other. That is, I was the trusting one, for one night—" He had been speaking with a reluctance growing with each word, as if he were performing a task decidedly against the grain; but at this point he stopped, his face went pale, and he raised

his head and looked round as if he had suddenly forgotten where he was or what he had been talking about.

"One night—" prompted Lady Sybil, softly.

He stared at her with a fixed stare, half rose, than sunk into his seat again.

"On second thoughts," he said, with a laugh as he slid his hand toward the wine-glass—"I'm afraid this is not the kind of story for a dinner-table—for ladies. Some other time—not now—not now."

His sudden pause, the unsteady hand, struck them all.

Lady Landon exchanged a glance with Lady Ferndale, and the two women rose. The other ladies accepted the intimation and filed out of the room. Lord Norman had risen and opened the door for them, and as Sybil passed he bent forward.

"Forgive me," he murmured. "If at some future time you care to hear—"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she answered. Then Madge came up last of all. He looked at her; then his eyes fell.

"I may see you alone, Madge—Miss Gordon?" he murmured.

Madge raised her eyes to his face, and her lips formed a "Yes," but no word came.

Was this, then, her boy-lover? Was this the Lord Norman of whom her girlish heart had dreamed and longed for?

Oh, how changed—how changed!

CHAPTER XVI.

MADGE found a seat in the corner of the great window in the drawing-room, and sought refuge in it. She knew that Lady Sybil's eyes were following her with an insolent stare, but they troubled her not. She sat quite still, hearing the voices of the other ladies as if they came to her through a dream.

"He was always handsome as a boy," she heard Lady Ferndale say, "and as a boy he favored the earl's side of the family. He is certainly an exception to the rule, that handsome children make plain men and women."

"The earl must be delighted to have him back," said another.

"Yes; it is all right now," remarked Lord Landon, with a smile.

"It is quite time he came back," said Lord Ferndale.

"He will settle down into a good country gentleman, I

sope," murmured Lady Delamoor, leaning back in the most comfortable chair, and the one nearest the fire. "We must try and make the place pleasant for him."

"Yes; really it would be too bad if he started off again," said a lady, with a laugh. "These wanderers find it hard to stop in one place for long. They miss their adventures, you see. By the way, that one he commenced to tell us must have been a very terrible one, for he was quite upset when he broke down and stopped short in his story."

"It was very painful, no doubt, and it was very hard to tell to so many," murmured Lady Sybil. "But," she added, with a faint smile, "I shall hold him to his promise that he would tell me."

The ladies exchanged glances, and one of them said naively, and looking at the fair face in the fire-glow:

"The most effectual way of keeping Lord Norman among us would be to find him a wife."

It seemed as if they could talk of nothing but the returned prodigal, and Madge, as she listened, alone and forgotten, wondered what the bevy of grand ladies would say if she rose and came forward and exclaimed:

"I am his promised wife!"

Then, as the thought crossed her mind, she smiled with bitter self-mockery. All that had happened years ago; a piece of childish folly which Lord Norman had evidently forgotten. Why, had not he himself said a few minutes ago that their acquaintance was only a passing one? Yes, he had forgotten her, while she had been treasuring up in her heart the memory of his handsome face, his loving, ardent words. And even if he had remembered the troth they had plighted in childish earnestness, how could she, who now knew more of the world, hold him to his promise, or permit him to keep it? He was Viscount Lechmere, the heir to an earldom, while she was only "the gardener's daughter."

Why, she had no right to be where she was at that moment. She was only there to gratify the whim of the old earl, whose notice of her had resulted from a passing fancy, which no doubt would now fade and perish.

She wished she could have opened the window and taken flight, she longed so wistfully to get back to the solitude of her own room, to think it all over; and she had actually risen to make her escape, when the door opened and the gentlemen entered.

They were talking and laughing as they came in, and Madge saw that Lord Norman's face was flushed and that his

eyes were shining brightly. He walked beside the earl, and had evidently offered him his arm, for the old man's long, thin fingers were resting upon it, but he was leaning on his stick also. His face was pale and set, and the thick brows were drawn over his fierce eyes. It seemed to Madge as if he were absorbed in thought, and scarcely remembered where he was.

Lord Norman looked round the room with a half-covertly keen glance, looked round as if he were noting its size and contents, then went with the others toward the fire, and sunk into a chair beside Lady Sybil's.

Madge saw the fair face turn to him with an exquisite smile, and she watched them as they talked together. She could not hear a word, for they were both speaking in a low voice, but she saw the look of admiration shine now and again in Lord Norman's eyes.

Presently one of the ladies went to the piano and sung, and Lady Lynne afterward played. Then there was a pause, and Madge heard Lady Lynne say:

"Do you sing or play, Lord Norman?"

He was about to reply, then hesitated.

"Oh, I am sure you do, or you would have said 'No' at once," she said, with a smile. "Pray go and do one or both."

"Well, I don't know," he said, with real or affected modesty. "It's a long time since I sung in civilized society. I used to pipe up round the camp-fire now and again. I will try, if you like. I don't suppose you'll ask me again."

He went to the piano, let his hands wander over the keys, then, playing with a good touch and fluent ease, began to sing.

There was an instantaneous silence, and every face took to itself an expression of surprise, gradually developing into admiration.

It was evident that Lord Lechmere was a musician, and that he was possessed of a charmingly pure tenor voice.

He had chosen "Come into the garden, Maude," and he sung it most perfectly. As the last note died away there was a hush, followed by well-bred but emphatic applause.

"Oh, please, sing again!" said Lady Ferndale.

He turned on the music-chair, and glanced at Lady Sybil. Her face was flushed, her usually cold blue eyes sparkling.

"Oh, yes, yes!" she murmured.

He inclined his head slightly, and after a moment or two, said:

"Perhaps you would like something colonial. Here is a

camp song;" and striking some loud chords, he dashed into a wild melody, a cattle-runner's song with a strong chorus.

The audience clapped their hands.

"Why, where did you learn to play and sing, Lord Norman?" asked Lady Ferndale. "Not at Eton, I'm sure?"

He had turned with a smile on his face, but at the sudden inquiry the smile fled, his hand went to his lips, and his eyes glanced from hers to the rest with a kind of sharp alertness. But in an instant the smile had returned, and, stroking his mustache, he replied:

"No, no, Lady Ferndale; not at Eton. I picked it up soon after I left England; while I was lying by with a broken leg."

While he had been singing, the earl, who had been sitting in his own chair beside the fire, had leaned forward clutching the arms, his face set strangely, his eyes fixed upon the singer. No one noticed the singular look on the old man's face, for all were as intent as he, and in the same direction. As Lord Norman answered Lady Ferndale, the earl sunk back, but he continued to watch the handsome face of the prodigal with drawn brows and tightly compressed lips.

"Your family has not been a very musical one, Lord Chesney," remarked an old lady who sat near him. "Lord Norman must get his voice from the maternal side."

The earl started slightly and turned his fierce eyes upon her.

"No doubt," he muttered.

They all pressed Lord Norman to sing again, but he laughingly begged to be excused, and, getting up from the piano, was walking toward the fire and Lady Sybil, when he caught sight of Madge in her quiet corner. He frowned slightly and stopped short, then crossed the room and went up to her.

Madge felt herself tremble as he approached, and yet not with the tremor of love.

"Do you sing or play, Miss Gordon?" he said.

Madge shook her head.

"No," she answered, in a low voice.

He bent over her with a smile, so that any one chancing to glance their way might think him merely exchanging polite small-talk with her, and in a whisper said:

"Will you let me see you in the small garden, to-morrow—shall we say at four o'clock?"

The small garden! The words recalled so much. He had not forgotten its name, at any rate.

"Yes," she said, after a moment's hesitation.

"You and I have much to say to each other," he mur-

mured, significantly; then turned from her and sought Lady Sybil.

Madge felt choking. The strange feeling, the commingling of sensations, of disappointment, wounded love, doubt, dread, pressed upon her heart. She waited until no one was looking in her direction, then opened the window and passed out.

No one saw her go. There was some more music—though Lord Norman could not be persuaded to sing or play again—and then the party began to break up.

Lord Norman stood at the door taking leave of the guests, his handsome face smiling and flushed. They shook his hand warmly and returned his smile. There could be no doubt that he had been a success. The prodigal had returned, not in rags and covered with humility, but in correct evening-dress and with a handsome face, a most charming manner, and a lovely voice.

As he took Lady Sybil's hand, he pressed it tightly.

"May I ride over and see you, Lady Sybil?" he said, in a low voice.

"Oh, yes; please do, and soon!" she said; and her small hand slightly returned the pressure of his.

"Well," said Lady Delamoore, as Lady Sybil sunk into a corner of the carriage, "what do you think of him, Sybil?"

Sybil was silent for a moment, then she said, softly:

"I am glad he is not married, mamma."

Lady Delamoore laughed.

"Take care, my dear; he refused you once, remember."

A hot blush rose to Lady Sybil's face.

"He will not do so again," she murmured almost inaudibly.

Lord Norman turned from the door after parting from the last of the guests, and drew a long breath as he stood in the center of the room. Then his eyes fell upon the earl, who still sat in his chair, and was watching him closely.

"I am afraid you are tired, sir," he said.

The earl started slightly, as if he had been lost in reverie, then rose.

"Let me assist you," said Lord Norman.

The earl seemed about to refuse, then let the tips of his fingers rest on the young man's arm; but at the foot of the great staircase he withdrew his hand.

"Good-night," he said.

"Good-night, sir," said Lord Norman. "I will have a cigar before I turn in. I hope you will not be too tired to-morrow to have some talk with me."

The old man inclined his head. Lord Norman watched

him as he slowly ascended, leaning on the baluster-rail and his stick, and at the top step the earl turned his head, and the two men looked fixedly at each other; then the earl went on his way, leaning on the arm of his valet, who came to meet him.

Lord Norman looked round the hall keenly, then opened the library door and scanned that apartment, then returned to the drawing-room, and after a glance walked to the window.

"Open!" he muttered. "I thought so! That is how she went, then. Why did she steal away so quietly? Could she suspect?" He frowned in deep thought for a moment, then his brow cleared.

"No, no!" he said. "Why should she?" He stepped out through the open window and looked round at the lawns, and flower-gardens, and the park, whose trees were dimly bulked in the semi-darkness.

"What a place!" he murmured.

Some one entered the room. It was the butler.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," he said, apologetically.

"All right," cried Lord Norman, affably. "Let me see, I forget your name."

"Robins, my lord," said the butler.

"Ah! yes. You remember me, Robins? I suppose not, though. I was only a boy when you saw me last."

"Yes, my lord; but I remember you," said Robins, evidently gratified by his lordship's condescension. "I knew you the moment you came in. Of course, you've changed very much; but that's only natural."

"Only natural!" said Lord Norman, and he raised his hand to slap the man on the back, but stopped in turn and carried the hand to his mustache. "And where are you going to put me? In my own room? Let me see, where was that? In the east wing?"

"No, my lord, in the west wing. But your room is on the first floor, south, my lord; next the room you dressed in this evening, overlooking the gardens."

"Ah, yes. I remember," said Lord Norman. "Well, I think I will go up now. Let me see, that door leads to—" and he nodded to a glass door.

"To the conservatory and palm-house, my lord," said Robins.

"Exactly. Of course, I remember. Yes, I will go up now. I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to show me the way—"

"Certainly, my lord. You did not bring a valet with you?"

"No, no," said Lord Norman, with a laugh. "I have been roughing it so long that I've grown unaccustomed to one."

Robins took up a silver candelabra from one of the side-tables, and led the way through the hall.

"That door," said Lord Norman; "that leads—let me see?" and he pointed to a small door at the end.

"To the path leading to the small gardens and Mr. Gordon's cottage. Don't you remember, my lord, that you used to use it when you were here that time?"

"Of course I do!" assented Lord Norman, with a smile. "Of course."

He followed the butler up the stairs and along the corridor—which was said to be the finest in England—and looked round him with the same covert intentness.

"This is your lordship's room," said the butler, opening the door of a large and superbly furnished room. "Is there anything I can get for you? Your lordship's portmanteau is in the adjoining dressing-room."

"Thank you, no," said Lord Norman, pleasantly. "By the way, though, you may bring me a syphon of soda water and some brandy."

"Certainly, my lord," said the butler, delighted to be of some service.

Lord Norman stood in the center of the room, and looked round with folded arms and a smile on his face.

"Fit for a prince!" he murmured. He went to the dressing-table of inlaid rosewood, and picked up one of the toilet bottles. "Silver, solid silver. It is a palace!"

Robins entered with soda and brandy on a salver, and set it down on a small table.

"Nothing else, my lord?"

"No, thanks. Good-night."

"Good-night, my lord."

Lord Norman quietly slipped the bolt into its place, and then stood in the center of the room and looked round again.

"Alone at last," he muttered, drawing a long breath and raising his arm above his head. "Heavens, what a time it has been!" His face grew pale, the lines about his mouth deepened, and his stalwart, graceful form drooped into an attitude of exhaustion. "Talk of walking over a volcano; it was worse than that! And yet it has gone off all right. I have got through it!" Then suddenly his brows lowered and his face grew hard and full of doubt. "That girl! Who

would have thought that she would be here? If I had only had the sense to ask the names of the people before I entered the room! Does she suspect? No, no! Impossible. It went off too well. No, she can not! She is very pretty. I don't wonder at Lord Norman's infatuation. But give me Lady Sybil! Ah!" He drew a long breath, and the animal look of admiration which Madge had shrunk from shone in his eyes. "Yes, Sybil! That is my style! You beautiful creature! She met me half-way, too!"

He looked round the room again, then went into the adjoining one, and unlocking his portmanteau, took out a small steel box. It was fastened by a cipher padlock, which can only be unlocked by the formation of the word known only to the owner. He unfastened this by forming the word on the padlock, and took out a thin package and a small book lettered "Diary."

"I'm all safe with these," he muttered, as he carried them into the next room and sat down by the table. He mixed himself a rather stiff glass of soda and brandy, and fetching a short brier pipe from his portmanteau, filled it, and smoked as he turned over the leaves of the diary.

"Yes," he murmured, in a tone of profound satisfaction, "it is all set down here; I can't go wrong. There's the handkerchief and the lock of hair, too. Oh, I'm all right!"

He looked up from the book with a smile of triumphant satisfaction, and stretched himself at full length in the luxuriously padded chair.

"The game's mine—mine! Well, I deserve it! Brains and pluck are worthy their reward, and what a prize! I am Viscount Lechmere—Lord Norman Eldred Beauchamp Fitz-George Lechmere—the heir to the earldom of Chesney!" He laughed, emptied his glass, refilled it and his pipe, and with half-closed eyes surrendered himself to delightful reverie.

Presently he was tired—the strain had been great—his eyes closed. His pipe dropped from his lips, and a portion of the burning tobacco fell upon his clothes and smoldered. The smell of the burning cloth awoke him.

With a suppressed cry of terror and excitement he sprung to his feet.

"The hut's on fire!" he cried—"the hut's on fire!"

Then, completely awakened by his own voice, he extinguished the smoldering tobacco, and, sinking into the chair, laughed softly. But his face was white and distorted, and the laugh quavered fearsomely.

CHAPTER XVII.

MADGE slept little that night. Her boy-lover of five years ago, and the handsome young man with the fluent speech and strangely watchful eyes, appeared to her in alternate visions: and when she awoke in the morning from a fitful slumber, it was with that sense of trouble and doubt with which most of us are acquainted, and which always comes brooding over us like an ominous raven in the first moments of returning consciousness.

She went about her work during the day in a kind of dream; but she paid her usual visit of charity to the village, and found every woman brimming over with gossip about the young lord, who had come back for good. But Madge could not be induced to talk about him, and got home as soon as possible.

On her way back she caught a glimpse of Lord Norman. He was riding a fiery young horse across the park—riding it with the evident intention of breaking its spirit, for Madge saw that the animal was cruelly bitted, and that its rider used a heavy whip frequently and mercilessly.

She turned away in pain and hurried on. That her Lord Norman—whose image she had been cherishing in her heart—could be guilty of sheer cruelty!

She noticed as she passed by the hedge that the whole place seemed to be in a stir and bustle, as if a new will and spirit had already made their influence felt. Men were hurrying to and fro, talking loudly, giving and receiving hurried orders. It was plain to her that the new lord intended rousing the Chase from its long quietude.

Her grandfather, usually so perfectly placid and silent, seemed at luncheon to be disturbed from his ordinary calm.

"You look worried, grandfather," she said. "Is anything the matter?"

"No—n-o, my dear. That is, nothing very much. The whole place seemed to be upset this morning. But that is only natural. The home-coming of the heir—"

"Have you see him?" she asked.

The old man nodded with slightly knitted brow.

"Yes; he came into the west palm-house soon after breakfast."

"And—and did you like him, grandfather?" she asked.

"Well"—he hesitated—"I ought not to answer one way or the other, for he was only in the house a few minutes; but—"

"But what?" she answered, in a low voice.

"Well, what opinion did you form of him last night, Madge? You sat at the same table with him, and heard him talk—perhaps spoke to him."

Madge kept her eyes on her plate.

"Yes, I spoke to him," she replied, almost inaudibly.

"But—but it was all so strange to me, and perhaps he did not appear at his best. He, too, must have felt strange."

"Then he did not impress you favorably?" said Mr. Gordon. "That is just how it was with me. I was quite prepared to like him, and to give him a respectful welcome; but—well, he did not remember me—"

"Not remember you?" she cried, with troubled surprise. Surely her grandfather had not changed so much in five years as to render recognition difficult!

"No; and yet I met him several times about the garden, and spoke to him, when he was here as a boy, and that is only about five years ago. He had not the slightest recollection of me until I told him my name, and reminded him that we had met before; and then he was—well, anything but civil, and swearing at the heat of the house, and wanted to know whether it was necessary to keep it at that infernal temperature, and walked—I was going to say, swaggered—out. I'm afraid, from what little I saw of him, that he has not the best of tempers."

Madge sighed.

"You will not have to see much of him, dear," she murmured, caressingly. But the old gentleman shook his head.

"I don't know. Things will be altered very much here, I think. Ever since I have been in charge of the gardens I have been to all intents and purposes my own master; absolutely free to come and go, and to order things as I chose; but I think that will all be changed now."

The young lord had already asserted his authority, and taken up his position as the heir and future master of Chesney.

"He had been round the stables before he came into the hot-house, and from what I heard dropped by the head groom, and the coachman, he was as displeased and dissatisfied with the stable arrangements as he was with my palm-house. The horses were all wrong—miserable screws and hacks—and the stables were, he said, quite out of date. Yes, 'Changes are imminent,' as Shakespeare says."

Madge sighed again. Lord Norman, five years ago, had

seemed to her the sweetest-tempered boy, even when he had knocked young Silas Fletcher down. How changed!

The afternoon wore away, and in the dusk of the darkening twilight she went into the garden and seated herself on the old rustic seat to await Lord Norman.

She had half thought of sending word to him that there was no need for him to come—that, indeed, she did not wish to see him. But in the end she deemed it better to see him, and hear what he had to say; to tell him in a few words that she was as ready as he to forget the childish romance which had passed between them.

She sat and waited, with her hands clasped on her lap, remembering vividly how she had sat and waited on that same spot five years ago, and presently she heard a step behind the laurel hedge. The gate opened, and Lord Norman came across the small grass plot to her side.

He was dressed in a suit of cords, which set his graceful, well-made figure to the best advantage, and something in his walk and manner recalled the boy—Lord Norman—to Madge, and made her heart beat fast.

“Good-evening—Madge,” he said, with a slight hesitation before her name, and raising his hat. “I trust I have not kept you waiting. I have been looking at a young cob I think of buying.”

“No,” said Madge, in a low voice, which was, however, perfectly steady. “I have come as you asked me, and I promised, though I am sorry that I had so promised, for I do not know what you can have to say to me, Lord Norman.”

He rested his foot on the edge of the seat, and bent over her.

“I should have thought you would have guessed!” he said, in a reproachful tone. “Have you forgotten what passed between us when last we met and parted?”

“No,” said Madge, with tremulous lip, but forcing a smile. “But I thought you had forgotten it, Lord Norman; and, indeed—”

“Forgotten it!” he broke in, with outstretched hand, and a gesture which might have struck Madge, if she had looked at him, as rather theatrical. “Forgotten it! Oh, no. I have thought of it often and often. This charming little spot has often appeared before me in my dreams. Why, it is here that we first met; it is on this very seat that you and I sat that day we read”—he paused a second—“‘Robinson Crusoe.’ Do you remember how proud I was of my illustrated edition, and how cozily we sat and looked at it? It was in at that

gate," he looked round, "that—that the boy, what was his name?—oh, yes, Fisher, no—Fletcher—Silas Fletcher—came. What a fight it was! And you took the blow intended for me! Forget! Why, it is all engraven in my memory, and can never be effaced."

Madge forced a smile, but her face was very pale.

"And then the night we parted!" He looked at the cottage, laughed softly, and sighed. "In my dreams I have often climbed up that lattice and heard your voice as you bid me good-bye."

Madge half rose. It was almost more than she could bear, this glib recital of the incidents which she had nursed in her girlish memory as something sacred.

"Don't you remember how we plighted troth, you and I? That I got you to promise to wait until I had made my fortune, and returned to make you my wife?"

Madge rose, and half turned away from him; then by an effort she controlled herself, and resuming her seat with set face and tightly compressed lips.

He watched her intently, with well-concealed anxiety. The afternoon was a dull one, the light waning, but he could see the trouble on her face, in her eyes.

"Ah, these boyish dreams!" he went on with a half-sad, half-tender accent. "How sweet they are! Sometimes I had to try hard to persuade myself that they were not more substantial than dreams, that all this had really happened." He paused, and his hand went to his pocket. "But," he went on slowly, impressively, and watching her closely, "you know I had a token—tokens—to remind me of their reality. Do you remember what they are? I am afraid you have forgotten, Madge!"

Her lips parted, but she did not speak.

"Do you remember giving me a lock of your hair, and permitting me to keep your handkerchief?"

Madge recovered her voice at last.

"Why—why do you recall all this, Lord Norman?" she said, trying to speak lightly, and as if she were amused by his reminiscences of the past. "I think I was foolish enough to act as you stated; a mere child—"

"With a woman's heart!" he said. "But, yes, you were a mere child—we were both children; and yet I'll be bound you were the first to forget—or, rather, to realize that it all meant nothing. You were the first to lose my little gift, the token of exchange for yours. You remember what it was?"

A boy's dearest companion, prized and treasured—his knife. I bought it for you that morning in the village—”

Madge started and looked up at him. His dark, handsome eyes seemed to shrink from her gaze, and instantly to become watchful and on the alert.

“What is the matter?” he asked, quietly.

Madge laughed with gentle scorn.

“You have forgotten something at last, Lord Norman,” she said. “The knife was not bought for me; it was an old one—had even two broken blades. See!” And she took the knife from her pocket and held it out to him, but with averted eyes.

How often and in solitude had she held that knife in her hand and gazed at it, with all a girl's tender, trustful sentiment.

Where was that sentiment now?

He bit his lips as he took the knife and examined it. And as he took it, it seemed to Madge as if something which had bound her to her girl life by a loving gentle tie had been broken and taken from her. Only a boy's broken knife, and yet it had meant so much to her!

“Of course!” he said, with a laugh, that covered his annoyance at his slip. “I remember it was an old one which I bought at a second-hand shop—”

She laughed with indifference. “You are wrong again, Lord Norman. It was a knife you had at school. Did not Smith Minor break the two blades?”

“Of course!” he said, laughing again. “How stupid of me to forget!”

His voice had grown hard, and something in it sent a chill through Madge's heart. It was as if she had never known that voice before, as if it were utterly strange to her. She shrunk a little, and looked up at him. By this time she could not see his face plainly, but, notwithstanding, it seemed to her as if it had grown paler, and as if the lines at the mouth had become deeper.

“And you kept my poor little knife,” he said, quickly; “kept it as I have kept your tokens. See!” He took out a thin pocket-book from his breast-pocket, and opening it, held it out to her. “Look, Madge! There is the precious lock of hair, and the dear little handkerchief; I have kept them all these years. You recognize them? Through all these years I have kept them.”

Madge rose. The strange, the horrible idea—too formless to be called an idea—that this man with Lord Norman's

voice and form and manner was yet *not* Lord Norman—which had flashed across her mind, gave way before this sight of those two simple tokens of her girlish love and betrothal.

Her heart beat; her eyes filled with tears.

"I see you have kept them, Lord Norman," she said, trying hard to speak steadily, lightly. "It was very thoughtful of you. But now, I think, you may return them. As you said just now, they were but the tokens of a childish romance. I am afraid both of us were painfully precocious. Give them to me, please."

She held out her hand.

He drew his back.

"Forgive me," he murmured; "though I fear you have ceased to attach any importance to that romance, I shall cherish at least the memory of it in my heart. Doubtless so beautiful and altogether charming a young lady as you, Miss Gordon, has received much more worthy admiration and homage than that which I, a raw and clumsy school-boy, laid at your feet. I would not dare to lay any claims to your regard given in those childish—"

Madge rose, her face paled and then flushed, her eyes flashing.

"Oh, pray, Lord Norman!" she said—and before this lovely, indignant face, this tall, slim figure, straight as an arrow, and drawn to its full height, he shrunk back cowed and awed. "If you had asserted any such claim, I could not have acknowledged it. The vows which you and I exchanged five years ago were, as you say, too childish to be worth a moment of our consideration now that you and I have come to years of discretion. If—which indeed is not likely—you have attached any importance to them, pray cast it off. If I have not forgotten that romance, I have learned its worthlessness, its unreality."

He stood before her with folded arms, his eyes fixed on her face, watching her, and listening intently.

With a catch in her voice she hurried on.

"Even if there was anything real in those vows, I—now that I am older—know that they could not be kept. I have grown to understand the difference between us, Lord Norman. I did not understand, appreciate it five years ago, when in childish folly I listened to you and—and exchanged promises with you. I know now that a wide, an impassable gulf stretches between you, Lord Chesney's nephew and heir, and—well, your gardener's granddaughter."

His face had flushed, the look of admiration flashed into his

eyes. He took a step forward, as if to take her in his arms; then he paused, just in time, and regained control of himself.

"I can not assent to that view of the case," he said. "You are a lady, beautiful, very beautiful"—she shrunk back with averted face—"worthy of any station, however lofty, and—and— But, Madge, Miss Gordon, fate is against me. My heart prompts me to cast myself at your feet, and implore you to ratify and renew your childish vow; but—"

With a theatrical gesture he shrugged his shoulders, and turned his head away.

—"But I am not free. My uncle has planned out my future. I, who have caused him so much trouble and anxiety, owe obedience to him."

"All this does not concern me, Lord Norman," said Madge. "Please give me those—those things."

She held out her hand for the handkerchief and lock of hair.

He made as if he were going to give them, then drew his hand back.

"Forgive me; bear with me! I can not part with them. Leave me at least these souvenirs of those past days which I have cherished so constantly, so warmly."

Madge turned from him with a wave of her hand. It conveyed indifference, almost contempt.

"Pray keep them if they have any value in your eyes, Lord Norman. They have none in mine. Good-night!" And with a quick, but not hurried step, with her beautiful head proudly erect, she crossed the lawn and entered the cottage.

He stood looking after her for a moment, as he folded and carefully replaced the packet in his pocket; then he passed through the gate into the great garden.

"By Heaven! she was splendid!" he muttered. "After all, I'm not sure that even Lady Sybil doesn't pale her ineffectual fires before her. That flash of the eyes as she renounced me! Phew! Another moment and I should have made a fool of myself, and been at her feet. Lovely, lovely! An empress—a queen; and yet a woman with a woman's heart and tenderness—all fire! But, no, no; that would not do! The future Earl of Chesney must not marry his garden-er's granddaughter."

He flung himself down under a tree, and lighted his old black pipe and smoked reflectively for a few minutes.

"That was a narrow squeak about the knife. I thought it was all up then. There was something in her eyes—what wonderful eyes they are! If they had looked at me with ten-

derness, with love, for only one moment, I should have been a gone coon! There was something in them which seemed to indicate suspicion. *If* I had faltered, broken down, the game would have been up. Yes, it is Madge Gordon, Lord Norman's girl-love, that I've got to fear. Love, they say, is keen of sight. It's wonderful that she has not detected me. And yet not so wonderful; I had it all pat enough; and the handkerchief and the lock of hair. But for those—Great heavens! what a risk I run while she is near!"

His handsome face darkened, his brows lowered—growing very like the earl's—and his even teeth closed over his pipe-stem savagely. "Yes, my pretty one, you will have to go. You know too much; your memory is too acute. Lord Norman and Madge Gordon can not breathe the same air with safety—to him, at any rate. You will have to go!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

HE sauntered to the house, and stood for a minute or two at the bottom of the steps, and looked along its great length, glowing with lighted windows. As he entered the hall the earl's valet came to him.

"The earl regrets that he is too unwell to dine with your lordship to-night; and he would be glad, my lord, if you will see him in the library when you have dined."

"Tell his lordship I will come to him directly after dinner, and that I am sorry he is not well," said Lord Norman; and he crossed the hall and rang the bell. The butler answered it.

"Let me see, we dine at—"

"Eight, my lord."

"Yes; well, then, bring me a soda and whisky, Robins."

"Yes, my lord. Mr. Fletcher has been waiting to see you, my lord. He has only just gone, almost as your lordship came in."

"Ah, yes; Fletcher, the steward," said Lord Norman.

"Did I miss him, I wonder? Let me see, he's a short—"

"Oh, no, my lord. Mr. Fletcher is tall and thin—very thin," said Robins, with a smile.

"Of course!" observed Lord Norman, "I remember. I'm sorry I was out. I want to see him. We seem to have missed each other this morning. Has he seen the earl?"

"No, my lord. The earl has seen no one this morning. He is not well enough."

Lord Norman listened rather thoughtfully, but he said, quite carelessly:

"I suppose Mr. Fletcher manages the whole of the estate?"

"Mr. Fletcher manages everything, my lord," replied Robins, with significant emphasis.

"I understand; including the earl, eh?" said Lord Norman. Mr. Robins smiled, and as he went for the soda and whisky Lord Norman stared thoughtfully at the floor.

"I hope Mr. Fletcher and I shall get on together," he muttered.

He lighted a cigar and was smoking furiously when Robins returned. The stately butler glanced with surprise at the cigar, and coughed nervously.

"What's the matter?" asked Lord Norman, who appeared to notice every change of expression on people's faces. "Smoking forbidden on deck?"

Robins looked embarrassed.

"Smoking is not—er—generally done in the hall, my lord," he stammered.

Lord Norman laughed.

"Where is the smoking-room?" he inquired. "You see, I was too young when I was here last to smoke—except in private."

Mr. Robins led him to a rather dull room at the back of the library, and Lord Norman eyed it with anything but favor.

"As usual, the dingiest room in the house!" he exclaimed. "I should go melancholy mad if I sat in this den long. We must find another room more cheerful than this, looking into the terrace and the garden. And look here, I'll have some guns, and fishing-rods, and whips, and that kind of thing. I'll make it a sort of bachelor's room; and you must have a cellaret, with some liquor always handy. See, Robins?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Meanwhile, I suppose, I must use this. By the way, where does that door lead to—back there? The room's full of doors."

"That one opens into the library, my lord; but it is never used. There's a thick curtain on the other side. Perhaps your lordship may remember?"

"Oh, I only looked into it last night," said Lord Norman, carelessly.

"I alluded to the time when you were staying here, my lord."

"Oh—a—yes!" said Lord Norman, quickly. "I remember it now."

He stood looking round a moment, then he said:

"After all, this isn't such a bad room, Robins. I'm

inclined to think that I'll keep it. That other door leads to the garden, I suppose? Yes, I'll stick to it. But we'll make it a deal more cheerful, or know the reason why."

"Yes, my lord," said Robins, respectfully. "Shall I speak to Mr. Fletcher?"

"Mr. Fletcher? What the devil has Mr. Fletcher— Oh, I see! No; we'll manage it between us without troubling Mr. Fletcher. Oh, by the way, Robins, that old man, the head gardener, Mr. Gordon; he has been here a long time, hasn't he?"

"Yes, my lord; a very long time."

"Seems rather a drowsy old slow-coach," said Lord Norman, plumping himself into a chair and putting his legs on another. "Getting past his work, isn't he?"

Robins looked surprised.

"Oh, I don't think so, my lord. He doesn't do much work, so to speak. He simply overlooks the gardens and conservatories and tropical houses. Mr. Gordon's quite a famous man, my lord, and is not expected to work."

"Oh! Then he is paid for doing nothing—that's what it comes to. I should have thought the earl would have preferred to have had a younger and more energetic man."

"Yes, my lord," said Robins, with respectful dubiousness. "I—fancy the earl is glad to have him; he's quite famous, you see, my lord. And too—"

"Well?" said Lord Norman, turning his keen eyes upon him.

"I was only going to say, my lord, that the earl seems to have taken a liking for Miss Madge, Mr. Gordon's granddaughter. They have been very much together lately. Your lordship knows she dined here last night; and I don't think the earl would like to dismiss her grandfather. You see, my lord, there is so much money—"

"That everybody thinks it ought to be wasted, eh?" said Lord Norman, with a laugh. "All right. You may go. Remember about this room; and for a start you can tell the person whose business it is, to put some decent, comfortable furniture into it—and at once."

When Robins had gone, Lord Norman got up and went across the room, examining the doors carefully. They were thick and heavy. He tried that leading to the library, but it was locked.

"I must have a key to that," he said. "I'll have first-rate locks put upon all of them. Yes, this room will do," he said, as he opened the door leading to the garden, and looked

out. "There's one disadvantage in the size of the place," he muttered, "though I ought to be the last to grumble at the vastness of the home of my ancestors—and that is, that it takes some time to learn it."

Probably impelled by this reflection, he pitched his cigar away and spent the time before the dressing-bell in going over the place; and at every turn he was almost fain to exclaim with wonder at the size and magnificence of the great house.

"By Heaven!" he muttered, when he had reached his room and began to dress. "It is fit for a prince—a prince!"

Though he was going to dine alone, he dressed with extreme care, and when the dinner-bell clanged from the tower, he descended the stairs, his head held proudly erect, his eyes glowing with self-satisfaction.

The meal was served in a smaller room than that in which the party had dined on the preceding night; but it was as rich in its old carved oak and costly appointments as the other, and the young man leaned back between the courses and looked about him with an air of approval and enjoyment. Two footmen stood behind his chair, the butler hovered about him. Every want was supplied almost before he felt it. The lights of the wax candles coming through their shades of red silk fell softly upon the exquisite glass, the rich orchids and magnificent plate. The choicest viands were offered for his selection; the menu was the work of a *chef* who was one of the first artists in England. What more could a man desire? And it was all his—or nearly his—would, indeed, very soon be absolutely his!

He leaned back and smiled, and drew a long breath, and emptied at a draught the glass of priceless Burgundy which Robins carefully poured out for him.

After dinner he went on to the terrace and smoked a cigar, and, with half-closed eyes, peered over the great gardens, the wide-stretching lawns. Beyond he knew, though he could not see them, lay the acres and acres of park, and the meadows and fields which comprised the Home Farm.

Beyond this again, for miles, rose the land which for centuries had belonged to the Chesneys, and with farms, and hamlets, and villages on its bosom. All his, or very soon to be his!

He threw back his head and looked up at the stars, and laughed softly, in the glow of the passion of possession which ran through his veins.

A footman came out.

"The earl would like to see you, my lord," he said.

Lord Norman started slightly. He had forgotten the earl. He flung his cigar away, and following the footman, was ushered into the library.

The earl was seated in a huge arm-chair by the deep fireplace, his bony hands resting on the arms of the chair, his head sunk on his breast.

As the young man entered, he raised his head and looked at him from under the dark, fierce brows.

Lord Norman stood with one hand resting on the table. The earl was pale and haggard, and in the fierce eyes there shone a strange light, an expression which baffles description. It was indicative of sardonic mockery, combined with something like superstitious dread—like that of a man who is fighting against fate with the knowledge that fate must win.

The two men looked into each other's faces in silence for a moment, then Lord Norman said:

"Good-evening, sir. I am sorry that you are unwell—"

The cold, metallic voice, husky and harsh now, however, interrupted him.

"Yes; I sent for you. I have something to say to you."

There was a pause, during which Lord Norman watched the bent figure, the fierce eyes, closely.

"I hear that you have already complained of my stable, and deigned to order fresh horses?"

Lord Norman smiled.

"Well, sir, I can't deny it. Really, for such a nobleman as yourself, the horses were the meanest set of screws. Why, out there—I mean Australia—we wouldn't have owned them. I dare say I expressed my opinion pretty freely, and have offended you; but—"

The earl raised his thin, claw-like hand, and let it fall on the arm of the chair again.

"It is of no consequence," he said. "All—all will soon be yours. You can then fill the stables with any horses you choose. It will all soon be yours."

Lord Norman looked at him with a show of sympathy and reluctance.

"I hope not, sir—" he began.

The earl raised his hand again.

"I have sent for you because I want you to be present while I sign my will."

The young man started, and a sharp, alert look came into his handsome face.

"Your will, sir?" he said.

"Yes," continued the earl in a hollow voice and with an

upward glance at him. "You know that all must be yours—,"

"I know nothing, sir," said Lord Norman, with a gesture. "You must not forget that I have spent the best time of my life in the Australian bush."

"All must be yours," said the earl, as if Lord Norman had not spoken. "All the land and the houses. They are all entailed. I could not dispose of them, even if I desired to do so. But—but there is some money."

The handsome face grew keener, the dark eyes flashed as if their owner were paying close attention.

"I have lived very quietly. I have had a large income, far beyond my expenditure. I have saved—as they call it—a large amount. I wish to leave this money—"

There came a knock at the door. The earl looked up.

"Come in," he said; and Fletcher, the steward, entered.

The earl fell back in his chair, and looked from one man to the other with a strangely keen and questioning gaze.

Old Fletcher had shuffled in with some papers under his arm, but at sight of the young man he had stopped short, and stared at Lord Norman.

"How do you do, Mr. Fletcher?" said Lord Norman, advancing and holding out his hand. "I am sorry you and I have missed each other all day. I wanted to see you. You remember me, of course? I remember you quite well. The last time I saw you was in this room."

Fletcher stared at him in silence for a moment, and over his face spread the strange expression which sat upon the earl's.

"I—I— You have changed, my lord," he stammered.

Lord Norman laughed.

"Why, of course. I can quite understand your not recognizing me in the first moment. Five years make a difference."

The earl's voice broke in.

"Have you the will, Fletcher?"

Mr. Fletcher, still staring in an extraordinary fashion at the young man, laid the papers on the table.

"It is here, my lord," he replied.

"Good!" said the earl.

He took the sheet of foolscap and read it over, then, raising his eyes, looked fixedly at the young man.

"This is my last will," he said. "By it I leave all I can leave—every penny, every inch of land that is mine, apart from the entail, to—"

He paused, and his face grew white, his eyes were fierce.

—"To my nephew, Norman Lechmere."

"To me, in fact," said the young man gravely, and looking from the earl to the steward. "Is there no one else to whom you would like to leave—"

The earl struck the paper with his hand.

"There are legacies to servants," he said, huskily; "the rest goes to my nephew."

"To me?" murmured Lord Norman. "You are very good, generous—to me, sir!"

Mr. Fletcher spread out the papers neatly and methodically on the table before the earl; but even as he did so his eyes wandered to Lord Norman's face. "There is a blank here, my lord," he said to the earl. "I am sorry to say that I have forgotten one of Lord Norman's names."

"Indeed," said the young man. "My names are Norman Eldred Beauchamp Fitz-George Lechmere."

Mr. Fletcher's lips formed each word as the young man pronounced it.

"Yes, they're right!" he muttered, under his breath.

The earl glanced from one to the other with the same inscrutable expression, then he took up the pen.

"One moment, my lord," said Fletcher; "we shall want witnesses. I shall do as one, but another is required. My son, Silas, is in the house; if your lordship does not object—"

The earl waved his hand, and Fletcher went to the door and called, softly:

"Silas!"

Mr. Silas Fletcher appeared, and so quickly, that one would have been almost justified in the suspicion that he had been listening all the time.

As he came in, he looked from one to the other with the sharp, quick gaze which is characteristic of the city man.

Lord Norman leaned against the table with folded arms, and scarcely glanced at the young man.

"His lordship, the earl, wants you to witness his will," said old Fletcher.

"Most happy, I'm sure," murmured Silas, awkwardly.

Mr. Fletcher handed the earl a pen, and the old man wrote his name firmly. The two Fletchers signed as witnesses, and the elder was collecting the sheets and blotting them, when suddenly the earl rose in his chair, and pointing to Lord Norman, who still stood with folded hands, exclaimed in a voice made terrible by suppressed passion:

"Look at him! look at him! Don't you know him,

Fletcher? You must be blind! I knew him the moment I saw him—I—”

White and trembling, Fletcher caught the trembling, raving man in his arms.

“My lord! my lord!” he cried.

“I knew him! Yes, I knew him the very first moment I saw him!” panted the earl, hoarsely. “The will! the will! Don’t let him—”

His voice died away into a horrid shriek, and with a groan he fell back into his chair.

The three men exchanged glances. Lord Norman was the first to speak.

“I call you both to witness that—that he knew, recognized, acknowledged me!” he said, hoarsely. “He acknowledged me as Lord Lechmere, his nephew and heir!”

As he spoke he looked at the Fletchers, father and son.

“Yes, yes,” faltered the old man. The younger said nothing, but fixed his eyes keenly on Lord Norman’s white face.

CHAPTER XIX.

THEY carried the earl through a crowd of terrified servants to his room, and Lord Norman and the two Fletchers, pale and silent, stood beside him till the doctor arrived.

He was an old man who had attended the Chesneys for years; the typical, steady-going, and by no means too acute country practitioner; but he saw at a glance what had happened.

“It is a stroke, a paralytic stroke,” he said, gravely. “I have feared this for some time, and have ventured, so far as it was possible, to warn Lord Chesney. Has there been any unusual excitement, any trouble—”

Mr. Fletcher, standing at a respectful distance near the door, was silent, and Lord Norman replied:

“N—o. Not immediately before he was seized. He had been making his will—Mr. Fletcher and his son were present as witnesses—and that may have excited him.” He paused a moment. “I am afraid that my sudden return may have upset him.”

The doctor nodded as he bent over the drawn, distorted face of the old man.

“That is not improbable, my lord,” he said.

“He was perfectly calm and natural during the signing of the will,” Lord Norman went on in a low voice. He turned

to Mr. Fletcher: "You saw no indication of mental disturbance, Mr. Fletcher?"

Fletcher shook his head.

"No," he said, almost inaudibly.

"Or you?" asked Lord Norman, glancing at Silas.

"No," said Silas; "it was after—" He paused.

Lord Norman inclined his head slightly.

"Ah, yes," he said, "I had forgotten for the moment. My uncle made a kind of formal recognition of me—at least that is what his words must have meant—and he seemed very earnest, if not excited. He fell ill immediately afterward. That is so, Mr. Fletcher? I am so confused—"

Mr. Fletcher nodded.

"Yes," he said, hoarsely; and he and Silas left the room.

"Is it very serious?" asked Lord Norman, anxiously.

The doctor shook his head gravely.

"It is a bad stroke," he replied. "At his lordship's age—"

"Do you mean that—that he is going to die?" There was a tremor in the young man's voice, which might well have been mistaken for the indication of tender, affectionate anxiety.

"I don't say that, Lord Norman. He may live for some time; but—but—"

"But what?" demanded Lord Norman, in a hushed tone.

"He may live, but I fear he will never recover the power of speech."

A faint flush passed swiftly over the young man's face.

"Oh, I trust, I trust—" he murmured.

The doctor shook his head.

"I can not pronounce a positive opinion, but I fear he will never again regain the use of his limbs, or be able to express himself intelligibly," he said, gravely.

Lord Norman turned away. The housekeeper entered to carry out any instructions the doctor might give; the valet stood at the bed, and both of them were witnesses of the young lord's evident emotion, and spoke of it afterward in the servants' hall.

"It is terrible, terrible!" Lord Norman murmured, as he turned to the bed again. "Oh! I can not tell you how glad I am that the last words he addressed to me were those of affectionate regard."

As he spoke, the earl opened his eyes, and stared up at him unconsciously for a moment; then a light came into them, and a strange look, which seemed like that of a man trying to express himself.

"What is it, sir?" murmured Lord Norman.

The distorted lips opened, but only a hard, unintelligible sound came from them.

The doctor shook his head.

"As I feared! As I feared!" he said, in a low voice.

The earl looked from one to the other with a dreadful appeal in his eyes, then gazed fiercely at Lord Norman.

"I think you had better withdraw, my lord," said the doctor. "I am afraid your presence excites him; he is evidently agitated."

Lord Norman sighed, as if reluctant to leave the earl, and as he went, said distinctly enough to be heard by the valet and the housekeeper:

"It is needless for me to beg you to do all you can for him, doctor, or to tell you how precious his life is to us all."

"Perhaps you would like to get further advice—a well-known physician from London?" the doctor suggested. "Though I am fully justified in telling your lordship that no physician, however eminent, could render us any assistance."

"I have every reliance on your skill and judgment, doctor," said Lord Norman.

The old doctor, evidently gratified, bowed proudly, and Lord Norman left the room.

He paused in the hall, almost filled with servants, and standing half-way up the stairs, he addressed them in saddened tones.

"I regret to say that my uncle has had a paralytic stroke, and is seriously ill. It is, I am sure, quite unnecessary for me to ask you to keep the house quiet."

A murmur of "Yes, my lord; certainly," answered him as they left the hall.

Lord Norman went into the smoking-room, and locking the door, sunk into a chair and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Phew!" he muttered. "That has been rather trying to one's nerves. And so the old man will never speak intelligibly again! That's rough on him, but it makes things very easy for me."

He lighted a cigar; his hand trembled.

"What did he mean by those words? What *could* the old fool mean except that he recognized me as his nephew, Lord Norman? And yet—and yet—" He got up and paced the room. "There was something in his tone, the look of his face, which seemed to mean just the contrary. He said he knew me, and asked Fletcher if he, too, didn't know me; and

said it as if he were exposing me, and holding me up as an impostor. How could he know me? How could he—”

A knock at the door disturbed him. He went and opened it. It was Silas Fletcher.

Lord Norman's face darkened.

“Well?” he demanded, curtly.

Silas Fletcher looked at him and then round the room; then his narrow eyes came back to Lord Norman's face, seen indistinctly in the shaded lamp-light.

“My father wished to know if he or I could do anything more to-night for your lordship?” he said.

Lord Norman, holding the door in his hand, shook his head.

“No, thanks. Stop. The will—”

“My father has that, my lord.”

“Very good,” said Lord Norman. “Tell him to take care of it—not that it matters—”

“No, my lord,” said Silas Fletcher. “If—if the earl should die, you would take all the property without a will, being his nephew and heir.”

Lord Norman nodded.

“Just so. Ask your father to come to me early to-morrow morning. Good-night.”

He was closing the door, but opened it again a little.

“By the way, Mr. Fletcher, I think I owe you an apology for the way in which I treated you when last we met.”

Silas Fletcher eyed him sideways.

“In the small garden, you remember?” said Lord Norman, with a smile.

Silas Fletcher looked at him full in the face.

“When I knocked you down—the quarrel over the dog—you know. It is very good of you to have forgotten it.”

Silas drew his thin lips into a smile.

“It's very good of you to remember it, my lord.”

“Not at all. If I can be of any service to you at any time, I should be very glad. Good-night.”

“I am extremely grateful; good-night, my lord.”

The door closed on him, and he walked across the hall, and down the steps, where his father was waiting for him. The old man's hatchet face was very haggard and drawn, and his claw-like hands fidgeted with the edge of his coat.

“Well,” he said, in a rasping, quavering voice, “what did Lord Norman say?”

“Oh, that we couldn't do anything for him.”

They walked in silence for some minutes, then Silas said:

“What did the earl mean by making a will in favor of his

nephew, Lord Norman, when there was no necessity for it? If he had made no will the money would still have come to Lord Norman."

"I don't know," said old Fletcher, passing his hand over his brow; "I can't comprehend."

"And what did he mean by shouting out that he knew him and you knew him? Of course he knew him, didn't he? Had he any doubt of it before?"

"I don't know; I don't understand," said old Fletcher again.

Silas bit his nails, and rubbed his sharp chin thoughtfully.

"I suppose the old man will never recover?"

"The doctor said so," said Fletcher.

"I mean that he will never recover his speech? I wish he could!"

"Why?" demanded Fletcher, huskily.

"Well," drawled Silas, screwing up his eyes till they were mere slits, "I should like to ask him what he meant just before he fell down; that's all."

The old man turned upon him suddenly, and, with unexpected energy, said, in a hoarse, agitated whisper:

"Silas, what can it concern you? Do you mind your own business. There are things—mind your own business!"

"All right, father; keep your hair on," Silas remarked, elegantly. "As you say, it's no business of mine."

But as he walked along, he scanned the troubled, haggard face beside him with a cunning scrutiny.

The next day the famous Sir Charles Sunford came down from London; but he could do nothing, and only confirmed the opinion of their family doctor.

"Your uncle may be spared to you for some time, my lord," he said to Lord Norman, as he delicately folded the check for a hundred guineas and put it in his velvet pocket-book; "but I am afraid he will never recover the full use of his limbs, or speak distinctly." And as he shook hands he too was impressed by the emotion which the young man's face expressed.

The news spread rapidly, as bad news always does spread, and all his friends and neighbors came to call and inquire.

Lord Norman saw them, and they all were touched by the evident sincerity of his grief.

"You see, I feel it very acutely, because—well, because we've been—been apart so long. I'm not going to say whose fault it was, where it lies, but—but it is very hard upon me

what he should be stricken thus just when I might have cheered his declining years," he said to Lady Ferndale.

"You may do that now," she murmured. "He recognizes you; it will comfort him to know that you are with him."

"Ah, I trust so—I trust so!" he answered.

Late in the afternoon Lady Delamoor and Sybil arrived.

The countess was pale to the lips, and for some minutes could not speak. Lord Norman held her hand and Sybil's—the latter with a gentle pressure.

"Do not grieve, dear Lady Delamoor," he murmured; "he is in no pain—Sir Charles assured me of that. Pray, pray do not grieve!"

"We feel for you so much, Lord Norman," murmured Sybil, sinking into a chair and clasping her hands.

"Your sympathy is very precious to me," he whispered, bending over her. "It leads me to believe, to hope, that you will remember my loneliness—for indeed I shall be very lonely in this great house. I have no friends, you see. I am quite a stranger to you all."

"Oh, no, no!" she whispered, looking up at him with a tender expression in her blue eyes. "Not to us! Have you forgotten—"

He let his hand slide down the arm of the chair till it touched her hand. "No, I have not forgotten. Sometimes I wish I could. But I was only a boy then—a stupid brute of a boy. But you remember that, dear Lady Sybil."

He would not allow them to go for some time, but begged them to remain as long as they could; and during the whole of their visit he hovered near Sybil, and on some pretext or other managed to touch her hand once or twice again before she left.

As they drove away she looked out of the window at the great house.

"It is to be hoped poor Lord Chesney will not linger long, mamma," she said.

Lady Delamoor looked up with a slight start. Some tears had fallen, and her eyes were still wet. "Are you quite heartless, Sybil?" she said, almost indignantly.

Lady Sybil turned her widely opened eyes upon her.

"Heartless? No, mamma! But surely it would be better that he should not linger in pain, unable to move and speak. I should be heartless toward both of them if I wished that."

"You speak of both—you think only of one!" said Lady Delamoor, with a touch of bitterness.

But Lady Sybil only shrugged her shoulders, and gazed dreamily at the house again.

Before many days had passed—we might say hours—it was realized that, though the old king was not yet dead, the young king had mounted to the throne, and that he intended to rule in royal fashion. On the third day he sent for Mr. Fletcher, and received him in the library, leaning back in the earl's favorite chair.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fletcher," he said, pleasantly enough, but with the unmistakable tone of the master. "I have sent for you because I think that I should know something of the estate. I hope to be acquainted with all its details in time. Please sit down."

Mr. Fletcher took a chair and sat in silence, with downcast eyes, as if waiting.

"My poor uncle will not, I fear, be capable of doing any business, and I must, though very reluctantly, attempt to fill the place he has vacated. I should like to know—"

"I understand, my lord," said Mr. Fletcher. "I expected that you would send for me, and I am prepared. I can give you an account of the property—your property, I might almost say."

He took some papers from a bag in his hand.

"Thank you," said Lord Norman, with grave courtesy. "If you will leave the list with me, I will go over it. I am afraid that the earl has somewhat neglected—"

Mr. Fletcher reddened.

"I trust you will find that I have been a faithful steward, my lord," he said, hastily.

"Of course! There is no question of that," Lord Norman replied, promptly. "I have every confidence in you, Mr. Fletcher; and it's because of that confidence that I am going to speak quite candidly. I should like to make a few changes in this establishment."

"Yes, my lord; changes?"

"Y—ea. The stables do not please me. I should like to have them rebuilt; and I have written to London for an architect."

Mr. Fletcher's lips formed the word "Already!"

"He will be down shortly. I shall commence at once. And, of course, when the stables are finished—before, indeed—I shall want a decent lot of horses. That is absolutely necessary. Now, I know what you are going to say—that all this means a heavy outlay and increased expenditure. I know it.

You would say, too, that this increased expenditure would, perhaps, annoy the earl, if he recovered consciousness."

"Yes," said Mr. Fletcher. "I was going to say so, my lord."

"Just so. But if I am going to spend in one direction, I must save in others. You must help me, Mr. Fletcher. What do you think we can cut down?"

The old man looked beyond the handsome face of the young one.

"There is no need—" he began.

"Oh, but we must!" broke in Lord Norman. "I have set my heart upon the new stable and the horses, but I am determined to make up for their cost by retrenchment of some kind. Let me see—ah, yes! those palm-houses and tropical conservatories, or whatever it is you call them. Now, I think there is a tremendous waste of money there."

Mr. Fletcher stared at him.

"Close the palm-houses?" he said, huskily. "They have been the pride of the Chase; they are famous. People come from the other end of the world to see them."

Lord Norman smiled.

"I fail to see that that is any reason for our retaining them," he said, dryly. "Why should I—we—keep a free show for the whole of the world to stare at? I hate having strangers hanging round the place. We will close the houses, Mr. Fletcher, or, if we don't close them, we will manage them more economically. For instance, the old gentleman, Mr.—Mr.—what is his name? of whom I was speaking the other night—Mr. Gordon; we will get rid of him. You know my idea—a smart young fellow at half Mr. Gordon's salary. There are plenty of such young fellows to be found. Yes; give Mr. Gordon notice—short notice."

Mr. Fletcher, his wrinkled face twitching, looked at his master.

"Of course, he must have some compensation. Write him a check for, say, a hundred pounds, and break it to him gently; the check will help you."

There was a moment's silence, then Fletcher said:

"Very good, my lord. Is there anything else, your lordship?"

Lord Norman yawned and stretched himself.

"No, I think not. You can leave those papers. I see you don't like the job I've set you," he added.

"No, my lord, I do not," said Fletcher.

Lord Norman took up the papers as a sign that the audience was over.

"Then you'd better get it over as soon as possible. Tell him to-day. The fact is, I shall want his cottage for my study-groom. See? Good-morning, Mr. Fletcher."

CHAPTER XX.

MR. FLETCHER walked slowly across the lawn to the small garden. Leaning on the gate was Silas, gazing at the cottage.

The father started. He had been walking with bent head, and had not seen his son until he had come close upon him.

"I thought you were going up to London to-day?" he said. Silas colored and looked aside rather awkwardly.

"So I was," he said; "but I found by my letters that I could manage to stop for another day. Where are you going?"

The old man jerked his head toward the cottage.

"I'm going to give notice to old Gordon," he said, grimly.

Silas started and stared at his father.

"Notice? What for? When is he to go?"

"His lordship does not require his services; he is to go now—at once."

"The earl!"

"The earl will give no more orders," said Fletcher, grimly. "It is Lord Norman."

Silas closed his thin lips and peered at his father's face.

"He's begun early," he said, with a short laugh. "I should like to know why—"

Fletcher passed through the gate and entered his cottage, and after a moment or two Silas followed him stealthily.

Madge came to the door.

"Is it you, Mr. Fletcher?" she said. "Please come in; grandfather is in the parlor."

Fletcher just raised his eyes and glanced at her.

"You are looking well, Miss Madge," he said, in his husky voice.

"I am quite well," she said. "How is the earl to-day?"

"The same as he was yesterday, and will be till the end comes," said Fletcher in exactly the same voice.

Mr. Gordon looked up as they entered the parlor, and blinked at Fletcher inquiringly. The table was littered with specimens and drawings of flowers—the latter drawn and painted by Madge's own hand. She had been engaged on a sketch when Fletcher knocked.

Fletcher stood with his long knuckles resting on the table, and blurted out the news. It was not his way to break bad tidings gently.

"I'm come to give you notice, Mr. Gordon," he said, impassively, and looking over the old man's head at a print on the wall.

Mr. Gordon did not take in the full significance of the curt sentence for a minute or so, during which the ticking of the clock was the only sound in the room; but Madge understood, and her face went white as she put her arm protectingly round her grandfather's neck.

"Give me—" stammered Mr. Gordon.

Fletcher nodded.

"Yes," he said. "His lordship—I mean Lord Norman—is going to close the palm-houses."

"Close the palm-houses?"

"Yes; he is going to keep a stud of horses instead."

Mr. Gordon would have risen in astonishment and dismay, but Madge gently kept him in his seat, and he sunk back trembling.

"I—I don't understand!" he faltered. "It is so—so sudden."

"Yes, it's sudden enough," said Fletcher. "Trouble always comes suddenly. I'm afraid it will be rather inconvenient for you to turn out so soon, but it can't be helped, and his lordship hasn't forgotten to compensate you."

He sat down at the table, and drawing out his check-book, filled in a check.

"What—what is he doing, Madge?" asked Mr. Gordon, helplessly.

Madge shook her head.

"I'm carrying out my instructions," said Fletcher, blotting the check deliberately, and then holding it out. "I was told to give you a hundred pounds, and his lordship's orders that you will leave the cottage as soon as possible. It's wanted for the new stud groom."

Mr. Gordon grasped the arm of his chair, and uttered a faint cry of bewildered grief.

"Leave—leave the cottage?" he stammered.

Fletcher rose.

"Yes," he said, impassively as before. "I'm sorry, though it's not my place to say so. I only carry out my orders. If the earl had kept his senses— There's the check; better take it, and take care of it, Miss Madge."

Madge took it, and held it in her hand, but without looking

at it for a moment or two; then she tore it across and across, and slowly let the fragments fall from her hand, her grandfather's eyes watching them, as they fell, with dull apathy.

Fletcher started slightly, and bent his brows upon her.

"Tell—tell Lord Norman," said Madge, with a spot of red on either cheek, her lovely eyes glowing on the wrinkled face opposite her—"tell Lord Norman that he can have the cottage to-morrow; that my grandfather bitterly regrets that he is obliged to pass another night under any roof belonging to Lord Lechmere. Tell him that we are not slaves, and that we would rather die than accept his money. Tell him—"

She stopped, breathless and panting, and sinking on her knees, put her arms round her grandfather, and hid her face on his shoulder. But she regained her composure almost in a moment, and kept back the threatened storm of tears.

"Don't grieve, dear," she murmured, consolingly, as if they were alone. "It is hard, I know. I know that you don't realize it yet—"

His eyes wandered round the familiar room, then rested on her beautiful face, and he bent his head and kissed her.

Then the tears could no longer be kept back, and hiding her face against his, she wept quietly, though her whole frame shook with the suppressed sobs.

Fletcher looked from one to the other.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You're a foolish girl to tear up that check. A hundred pounds is a good sum; and I shouldn't think you'd got too much—"

Madge raised her head.

"Thank you for your sympathy, Mr. Fletcher," she said, with quiet dignity as she battled with her tears. "Will you please give Lord Norman my—our—message?"

Fletcher took up his hat, stared at the opposite wall for awhile abstractedly, then without a word went out. Almost immediately afterward Silas entered, and entered so noiselessly that neither of the two persons cowering under this "thunder-bolt from the clear blue" heard him until he spoke.

"Miss Gordon's done the right thing, Mr. Gordon," he said. "You ought to be proud of her!"

Madge started, and looked round at him, and the old man stared at him dully.

"I beg your pardon for intruding at such a moment, Miss Madge," he went on in a low voice, and with downcast eyes, "though—though it's just at such times as these that a friend might be permitted to intrude."

"You know—" said Madge, almost inaudibly.

"Yes," he said, apologetically. "I happened to be passing, and—and—and I was too taken aback by what I heard to go, till it was too late. And if you'd forgive me for saying so, I'm glad I did stay."

Madge rose and smoothed her hair, her bosom still heaving, her eyes wet with tears, reminding Mr. Silas, as he glanced at her covertly, of a beautiful picture he had seen in one of the London print shops.

"I always thought that Lord Norman was a beast—" He stopped and changed his tone as Madge started; for his words had recalled the boyish quarrel. "But I won't abuse my father's employer, though if I had my way he wouldn't be his employer long. What I came in for, Mr. Gordon, was to say that—that I wish you'd let me help you—"

The blood rose to Madge's pale face, and her eyes turned upon Silas's with a proud refusal in them.

"No, no! I don't mean in that way, Miss Madge. I wouldn't presume to offer—to offer—money— What I meant was that, as you've got to go—"

Madge's lips quivered.

—"And at once, perhaps you'd let me try and help you— Mr. Gordon—as any other friend might do. You see," he went on cheerfully, and in a kind of matter-of-fact way, "Mr. Gordon's been living here, in this out-of-the-way place, so long"—Madge sighed and her grandfather moaned and hung his head—"that he's lost his business ways, if he ever had any. Now," with a smile and a perky jerk of his head, "I'm a business man, and when there's a difficulty I can see my way through it—or I'd know the reason why."

"You are very good," said Madge, in a low voice; "but you can not help us."

"Oh, but I think I can. I'm sure I can if you'll let me," he said. "I don't suppose you have many friends?" he added, half interrogatively.

Madge shook her head.

"No," she said, "we haven't any friends, excepting those in the village, and—and those we must leave."

"Well," he said, humbly, "you've one friend, at any rate, Miss Madge. Now, look here, Mr. Gordon—"

The old gentleman started; he had not grasped a single word; the blow had crushed all the intelligence out of him, and he still sat unconsciously turning over a specimen.

"Well, I won't trouble you," said Silas. "Miss Madge and I will talk it over."

He signed to Madge to follow him into the hall, and Madge almost mechanically did so.

"It's just this, you see," said Silas, in a low voice—though he might as well have spoken aloud; "the question is: What's the best thing to do? That's what we always ask ourselves in the city when we're in a tight place."

"We must leave here at once. Grandfather must find another situation," she said, sadly.

"Well, perhaps so; though I'm not so sure about another situation," said Silas, thoughtfully. "Your grandfather is getting old—"

Madge winced, and lifted her beautiful eyes to him piteously.

"I mean old for that kind of thing. Now, I'll tell you my plan—for I've got a plan, Madge. We always have in the city, you know. Why shouldn't we take him to London?"

"To London?" Madge almost started.

Silas watched her with suppressed eagerness.

"Yes," he said, "to London."

"There are no gardens there, are there?" she said, anxiously.

"Well, there are plenty of them, for that matter," he said.

"But I wasn't thinking of the gardens. Isn't your grandfather writing a book—a work on botany?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" said Madge. "I had forgotten."

"There you are, you see?" he said, triumphantly. "That's where a clear head comes in. I hadn't forgotten it. Well, that book, when it's finished, will be worth money. It's as likely as not that he'll make more money out of it than he had made out of the kind of berth he has had here."

"And—and he is so fond of writing," murmured Madge.

"Just so," said Fletcher. "It's far more suitable work for him. Now, what I propose is, that you should go into lodgings in London." He paused a second or so. "I know just the sort of rooms you want. They're near the British Museum."

"The British Museum?"

"Yes, where the library is, and where Mr. Gordon could go and study, and all that. He'll soon finish his book up there, and sell it for a lot of money."

Madge, with her wonderful eyes fixed dreamily and hopefully—far, far beyond Silas Fletcher's face—sighed softly.

"And I could help him," she murmured more to herself than to him. "I could make the drawings."

"Of course you could," said Silas, "and make a great deal of money in other ways. Ah, London is the place for

clever people, Miss Madge." He had almost added, "Look at me!" but stopped himself in time. "Well, what do you think of it? Isn't it a fine plan?"

Madge looked round and sighed.

"To leave it all!" she murmured, too softly for Mr. Silas to hear her.

"I suppose," he said, looking at the ground, "that you'd like to leave at once."

"At once? Oh, yes, at once!" she said.

"I dare say Lord Norman would let you remain a week or two if you asked him," he suggested, glancing at her sideways.

Madge's hands clinched at her side.

"I would not ask him if—if—my life depended on it. Mr. Fletcher"—her breath came and went spasmodically—"please do not mention Lord Norman's name to me again."

"I won't—I won't, Miss Madge," he responded. "I can quite understand. Why shouldn't you go to-morrow? I suppose there's nothing to prevent you. The furniture could be sent afterward."

"I—I think it is the earl's," said Madge, wearily. "I don't know. I'm afraid my grandfather hardly knows."

"Let the furniture go," said Silas, with a wave of his big white hand. "Let it go. Look here, Miss Madge. You get your things together and go up to London to-morrow. I'll telegraph to the landlady of the rooms I spoke of, and we'll have everything ready for you by the time you arrive. I'm going up to London to-morrow. I may just as well go by the same train, and keep you—your grandfather—company."

Madge leaned against the wall, her hand clasped tightly, her eyes fixed on the familiar, the beloved, view framed by the door-way.

To-morrow she would look at it for the last time!

She fought the tears hard; but the beautiful eyes were moist as she turned them to Silas Fletcher.

"You are very good to think of all this—of everything," she murmured.

"Not a bit of it," said Silas. "It's just what any one would do. And—and"—he shuffled his big feet in their patent boots awkwardly—"if—if you—if Mr. Gordon—should be in want of any money—I know that it does happen so sometimes—"

The red flamed again in Madge's face.

"Oh, no—no!" she murmured, "there is some money—it is not much—but it is enough for the present, and you say—you are sure that my grandfather's book—that I can earn—"

"Quite sure!" he exclaimed. "Don't you have any fear or doubt on that score. I won't keep you any longer; you must have a bit to do, packing and all that. I'll meet you at the station at 10.15 to-morrow. Keep up your spirits, Miss Madge. It will all come right!"

He held out his hand—the big white hand, which matched so badly with his thin figure—and it closed upon the one Madge gave him with an unpleasant pressure.

But Madge did not notice it; all her thoughts were of her grandfather. When she returned to the parlor she found him sitting in much the same attitude in which she had left him, and when she outlined Silas Fletcher's plans, he neither expressed assent nor dissent, but apathetically nodded, as if their future had passed beyond his control.

The remainder of the day, and far into the night, Madge spent partly in packing, and for the rest in sorrowful reverie.

Her boy-lover had not only ceased to love her, but was eager to turn her and her grandfather adrift on the world!

After a fitful sleep of a few hours, during which she dreamed of Lord Norman as he sat beside her years ago on the garden-seat, she rose, and completed her preparations for flight.

Her grandfather came down to breakfast with the absent, preoccupied expression on his face which was habitual to him, and it was not until she had recalled to him the scene with Mr. Fletcher that he realized that they were leaving the cottage forever; and even then he only sighed and looked round the little room with a sad wistfulness.

At half past nine a fly came to the door—Silas had remembered to order it, though she had not.

Before entering it Madge looked round the small garden. Instinctively her eyes sought the old rustic seat, and she shuddered. Little the worse for time, that bench remained the same; but how changed was Lord Norman since he had sat on it beside her!

She could not trust herself to bid good-bye to the village folk, and hid her face in her hands as they drove past the cottages in which she had so often been the ministering angel when pain and sorrow were present.

As for her grandfather, he seemed to have lost all consciousness of their position, and appeared to be unable to realize that he was bidding farewell to his beloved gardens and hot-houses.

At the station Silas awaited them. He got their tickets—for which Madge paid—and put them in a third-class carriage,

with all the experience of a frequent traveler; and during the whole of the journey—a long and wearisome journey for Madge—he was unobtrusively but constantly attentive.

They reached London at nightfall, and the four-wheel cab conveyed them to their lodgings. As Silas had said, they were in Bloomsbury, and near the British Museum.

The landlady, a motherly kind of woman, received them, and did her best—it was not her first experience of “country folk,” as she called them—to make them comfortable. She had prepared a kind of “high tea” for them, and assured Madge—Madge, confused and bewildered by the noise of the London streets—that the beds were well aired, and that “everything was as clean as clean could be.”

Silas superintended the carrying up of the boxes from the cab, but declined Madge’s invitation to tea.

“You’ll like to be quiet, and by yourselves,” he said, with a knowing smile. “But perhaps you’ll let me look in to-morrow and see how you are getting on,” he added, as he held out his hand.

Madge took it with something like a pang of self-reproach. She had loved—in girlish fashion—Lord Norman, and he had turned her grandfather and herself out of house and home. She had disliked and mistrusted Silas Fletcher, and he had proved their only friend!

“I am trying to find some words in which to thank you, Mr. Fletcher,” she said, with a smile on her tremulous lips.

“Oh, I’ve done nothing—no more than any friend would do!” he said, with a laugh. “Good-night.”

But as he walked down Hart Street, Bloomsbury, a smile of satisfaction and triumph curved his thin lips.

“I’ve managed this pretty well, I think,” he murmured. “If I don’t make a very great mistake, you are caught and caged, my proud beauty!”

CHAPTER XXL

MADGE lay awake that first night in the great city which never sleeps. She felt terribly lonely and perfectly helpless. There seemed to be no air in the room, though it was not a bad size for a London lodging-house; and the dull, incessant rattle of the night cabs and the rumble of the market wagons beat upon her weary brain.

The house in which Silas had engaged rooms for them was in a little *cul-de-sac*, called Harding Street, leading out of Hart Street.

It was, comparatively speaking, quiet—there were only about half a dozen houses in it—and it was perfectly respectable, though rather grimy and dingy. A doctor, with a small “beginning” practice, lived in one, and a dress-maker in another; the rest were lodging-houses, each displaying the familiar card with “Apartments” on it in the window.

Every house, Madge thought, must at least have owned two cats, judging by the number which prowled around, serenading and fighting.

She was awakened in the morning from a fitful slumber by the shrill cry of the milkman, and drawing her blind a little aside, she looked through her window.

The room was at the back of the house, and overlooked a small yard belonging to it and the yards and backs of other houses.

To her, accustomed to the sweet prettiness of the small garden and the ornate grandeur of the great Chesney gardens, the view looked squalid, and she was shrinking back, appalled, when some objects in one of the yards caught and held her attention. These were great blocks of stone or marble massed in Titanic confusion, as if some giant had grown weary of carrying them, and had thrown them down carelessly.

Just beyond the yard, and belonging to it, she saw a kind of workshop with a glass roof, and from the workshop came a peculiar sound.

She puzzled over it for some time, then solved the enigma. The workshop was a sculptor’s studio, and the huge blocks of stone and marble were his rough material.

Adjoining the sculptor’s yard was a horse-dealer’s premises, with a short ride covered with tan. A couple of men were exercising some horses, and the sight of the animals was grateful to her, for it recalled the country in a vague way.

The prospect was very dismal, and as she looked, Madge wondered whether this could really be a marvelous city paved with gold, and inhabited by all that was bright and beautiful—the city she had read of in so many books.

She dressed quickly, and went down to the sitting-room.

The breakfast was being laid by a diminutive servant-girl, who looked as if she had been too suddenly aroused from sleep—as doubtless she had been—and who had three distinct smudges of soot on her rather pretty face.

“Good-morning,” said Madge, just as she would have spoken to one of her village school-children. “Let me help you.”

The girl cocked her head like a London sparrow, and glanced at her sideways, pausing with a cup and saucer in her hand.

"'Elp me?" she said, with a beautiful cockney drawl. "Wot for? Lor' bless you, miss, I don't want no 'elp."

"You are one of the maid-servants, I suppose?" said Madge, setting straight the breakfast things, which the girl had huddled together on the tray, that had once borne a lovely landscape in impossible colors, but of which only very vague traces remained.

"One of 'em!" said the girl, with a grin. "I'm the only one, miss."

"The only one—for this big house?" Madge could not help exclaiming.

The girl grinned again, and dropped some knives and forks into their places with a clatter.

"Yes, miss, I'm the only one; and I does it all excepting the cooking—Mrs. Polson does that—and sometimes we has a charwoman in, mostly on Saturdays, just to clean up; not but what I could do it, for I'm as strong as a 'orse, as I often tells Mrs. Polson; but she will 'ave her."

Madge found it rather difficult to follow the girl, not only by reason of the misplaced "h's," but also because the sentences were spoken without any punctuation whatsoever.

"There must be a great deal for you to do," she said in her gentle voice. "Will you tell me your name?"

"'Tilda," said the girl, pleasantly. "Sometimes I'm called 'Tilly, and sometimes, when Mrs. Polson's cross, it's Mertilda. I like 'Tilda best."

"Then I will call you 'Tilda," said Madge.

"And what's your name, miss?" asked 'Tilda.

Madge told her.

"Well, I like it," remarked 'Tilda, after a moment of cautious reflection. "And you're real gentlefolks, you and your grandfather, ain't you? Leastways I 'eard that gentleman, Mr. Fletcher, tell the missus so, and I see'd it was true the moment I clapped heyes on you. Lor' bless me, I can tell! There's a real gentleman lodges on the ground floor, though he is only a scalper."

"A what?" said Madge, looking round from her operation of coaxing the sullen fire into a blaze.

"A scalper—wot carves things in marble. His stoddio is just behind the 'ouse."

"Oh! a sculptor, you mean," said Madge.

"Yes, I dare say that's it," assented 'Tilda, with serene

complacency. "Hare you going to have white lump sugar or brown?"

"White—I don't know. Why do you ask?" said Madge.

"Oh, because there's three halfpence a pound difference," replied "Tilda, shrewdly.

"Then we will have brown," said Madge.

"Tilda eyed her keenly.

"All right, miss," she said. "I allus asks that question, and then I knows whether the lodgers are flush or not."

"Are—are what?" asked Madge, with a puzzled stare.

"Whether they're well off or not. If you're well off you turn up your nose at brown; nothing but white lump is good enough for you."

"I see," said Madge. "But we are not well off, "Tilda; therefore, we'll have brown."

"All right, miss. I'll have the breakfast ready in another ten minutes or so. Shall I give your grandpa a call?"

"No, thank you," said Madge. She put the rest of the breakfast things into something like order, then went to her grandfather's room. He did not answer her knock, and she entered softly.

The old man was sleeping as peacefully and soundly as an infant. She bent over him, and murmured a prayer, then went down-stairs again.

"Tilda had brought up the breakfast. It consisted of a couple of eggs, two thin slices of bacon, and a couple of pieces of toast.

Madge set them down to the fire to keep warm, and presently Mr. Gordon came down.

It would have been evident to less lovingly acute eyes than Madge's that he had not yet recovered the shock of his sudden dismissal and removal from the Chase.

He took his morning kiss, and looked round the dingy room with the same apathy with which he had received Mr. Fletcher's notice, and sunk with a sigh into the chair Madge drew up to the table for him.

"Have you slept well, dear?" she asked.

"Yes, yes," he said, pushing the white hair from his forehead. "Oh, yes. And so we are in London, Madge!" and he sighed.

"Yes, grandfather," she said as cheerfully as she could. "This is our first day. You must make a good breakfast, because we must go out presently and find the British Museum, where the great reading-room is, you know."

"I know where it is; I used to read there a great deal. But—but I've forgotten."

He nodded abstractedly and turned to the table. But she saw with dismay that he only made a pretense of eating, and that his hands trembled as they held the cup and broke the bread.

"We will go to the park before we find the reading-room, dear," she said. "I am afraid there will not be many flowers there now"—poor Madge, she had no conception of a London park in winter!—"but there will be the trees and the shrubs, and Mr. Silas says they are some of them very fine."

"Yes, yes," he said, indifferently. "When is Silas coming again?"

"I don't know, grandfather. We must not expect him to come very often. He is a very busy man, you know, and can not have much time to waste. He has been very kind already—"

"Yes," he said, with drooping head. "He has been a true friend, our only friend."

When they had breakfasted, Madge, with some difficulty, persuaded him to go out. The noise of the crowded streets confused her and distressed him, and she inquired her way to Hyde Park, and got there as soon as possible.

Although there was no fog, it was a moist, muggy day—who, that has once experienced it, will ever forget a November in London?—and by contrast with the bustling streets, the park, with its great bare trees and emerald grass—the sooty atmosphere of a great city is good for grass, and London grows it far greener than it can be obtained in the country—seemed Paradise.

Mr. Gordon began to look about him after awhile, and to examine the trees and shrubs, while Madge sat on one of the seats, and gave the reins to reverie.

Many of the passers-by looked at the graceful figure and lovely face, with its sad expression, and wondered who and what she was; and once a man, who wore the garb of a gentleman, approached her with an insidious smile; but as the clear, gray-blue eyes were raised, he shrunk back and hurried on, ashamed; for once, in his life, at any rate.

Mr. Gordon was loath to leave the park, and sighed when they got into the turmoil of the great thoroughfare again.

"We must go there every day, Madge," he said, with a sigh. "One feels as if one could not breathe in these streets—as if every breath one drew robbed one's fellow-mortals in this throng. They call this life!" He looked round

him as some one jostled against him. "It is worse than death!"

In the afternoon Madge took him to the British Museum library. As he had said, he had quite forgotten where it was. At sight of the great domed room, with its tiers upon tiers of books and lines of silent students, the old man's face brightened, and he sunk into one of the luxurious leather-padded chairs before a desk with a sigh of contentment. An attendant brought him a botanical book he asked for, and he was soon lost in its pages. Madge sat beside him, as she had sat in the park, for some time; then it occurred to her that she might leave him while she did some necessary shopping, and arranged the sitting-room out of its hideous formality.

"Yes, yes, I will wait here till you come back; you need not hurry. It closes at five, and if you are not back by then I will wait outside by the gate. There is a passage here on conifers which I believe to be totally incorrect. I must have some more books," and he wrote the necessary slip with rapt eagerness.

Madge, feeling that she could leave him with perfect safety, went out into the street again.

The winter evening was closing in, the shops were lighting up, a great and terrible sense of loneliness fell upon her; but she put it from her, and striving to concentrate her thoughts upon the trivial duties which, after all, are the all-important ones of life, she hurried over her shopping and got back to Harding Street.

As she stood waiting for the door to open, a gentleman came up the steps, and, raising his hat, said:

"Pardon me, have you knocked?"

He was a man past middle age, with large features and a leonine head. His hair, of iron gray, was thick and long, and his eyes large and expressive. There were many lines on his face—lines which told of much hard work and fierce struggling, but the mouth under the heavy mustache was a kindly one, and the voice, though deep and rather abrupt, was gentle.

His eyes rested on Madge's face with a kind of comprehensive glance, then looked dreamily beyond her.

Madge said she had knocked, and presently Tilda opened the door. The smuts were still on her face, and so also was the expression of good-tempered shrewdness.

"Oh, it's you, miss," she said, "and you, too, Mr. Gerard."

"Yes, Tilda," he said; then he glanced at Madge, taking off his hat.

"You are our new lodger, madame?" he said.

"Yes," she assented, and he stood aside for her to pass.

"That was the scalper," said 'Tilda, following Madge into the sitting-room.

"The sculptor? He seems a very pleasant gentleman. And now, 'Tilda, if you can spare five minutes—only five minutes—I want you to help me move the sofa and the sideboard."

"Lor' bless me, wot for, miss? Ain't they very well where they are?"

"It is only a whim of mine," said Madge, persuasively. "Never mind; you must just humor me. See, I want the sideboard where the light falls on it, and the sofa in that corner, so that I can put the arm-chair near the fire for my grandfather; we must be quick, for I left him in the museum. Thank you—you are very kind not to mind the trouble I'm giving you, 'Tilda."

'Tilda stared with all her eyes.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "To think of your talking like that! Why, it ain't no trouble. You should see the trouble some of 'em gives me! It's ' 'Tilda, do this,' and ' 'Tilda, do that, and look sharp about it, d'ye hear?' and the missis that sharp and short with me when she's cross. It's only Mr. Gerard who ever gives me a 'Please' or a 'Thank you, 'Tilda;' and I'd do anything for him, and so I would for you, miss, specially when you speaks to me in that nice soft voice of yours. Trouble! Not much!"

In half an hour Madge, with 'Tilda's willing and almost enthusiastic assistance, had made the hitherto appallingly uncomfortable room quite cozy; then she went off to the museum to fetch Mr. Gordon.

She found him as she had left him, absorbed in his book, and she waited patiently till the clock struck the hour of closing.

He was so absorbed that he walked through the street like a man in a dream, and did not notice the changed aspect of the room; but he sank into the arm-chair with a sigh, and warmed his hands at the fire with an air of contentment.

All through the tea-time he talked of the passage on confers which he had been studying; and when the tea-things were cleared away he asked Madge to get him his manuscripts and specimens.

"I must get to work," he said, dreamily; "I must get this book finished; as Silas says, it will bring us some money—"

Before he had finished the sentence 'Tilda opened the door.

"Here's the gentleman come to see you, miss," she said, by way of announcement, and Silas entered.

He was in evening-dress, and looked almost—almost—a gentleman. He carried a small bunch of flowers. His sharp eyes scanned the room, and he noticed the change in it instantly.

"How do you do, Mr. Gordon? How do you do, Miss Madge? I say, you look cozy! You've made the room look quite different! I thought you would. Why, it looks quite home-like already! I thought I'd just look in as I was passing—I'm going down to a swell city dinner—and see how you were getting on. You're looking first-rate, Mr. Gordon; and the same to you, Miss Madge, if I may say so," and he bowed expressively to Madge as he took a chair. "I've brought you a few flowers, Mr. Gordon. It occurred to me that you wouldn't find many growing round Bloomsbury Square," and he offered the bunch, with a grin.

The old man took them with an absent nod, and examined them.

"Orchids!" he murmured. "Where did you get them? They are rare."

"Oh, I hunted 'em up," said Silas, with a wink and a smile of satisfaction, "and there's plenty more where they came from."

He glanced at the table littered with books, papers, and specimens.

"Been at work, I see. That's right. You must get that famous book of yours finished as soon as possible."

"Yes, yes," murmured the old man.

"It's about the book that I dropped in this evening," Silas went on, addressing Mr. Gordon, but looking sideways at Madge as she bent over her painting. "It struck me that I might be of some use to you in the matter of that book. You see, you authors are never business men. It stands to reason that you couldn't be. The two things, writing books and business, don't go together, do they?"

Mr. Gordon blinked at him, and nodded.

"Well, I'm a practical man, and I fancy you'd better leave the business of the publishing to me. When it's finished—it's pretty nearly done, isn't it?"

"Nearly, yes; nearly."

"Very well, then. When it's finished, I'll take it and dispose of it for you. I can do that kind of thing a great deal better than you can, don't you think so, Miss Madge?"

Madge raised her grave eyes.

"Yes, I think so. You are very kind, Mr. Fletcher—"

"Not a bit of it," he broke in. "It's no trouble to me, and you'll see I'll manage it all right, and in about half the time Mr. Gordon would take. We'll have that book out in a jiffy."

There was a pause, during which he watched Madge's face as she bent over the drawing; then he said, in a casual way:

"I don't know whether you are fond of theaters and concerts, and that kind of thing, Miss Madge?"

Madge looked up with a smile.

"I think I should be, but I have never been to any, excepting the village concerts."

Mr. Silas smiled disdainfully.

"Oh, they're nothing!" he said. "You want to see the London theaters, and hear a concert at St. James's Hall. By the way, I've tickets for to-morrow night—three tickets—if you'd care to go."

Madge shook her head.

"Thank you very much," she said, gently but firmly; "but grandfather is not strong enough."

Mr. Silas bit his lip.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Another time, perhaps. Well, I must be going." But he still sat on, talking principally to the old man, but watching Madge with covert wistfulness, the "passion's hunger," which tortures itself by the sight of that for which it craves.

Madge was very silent; she told herself that he had proved himself a true friend in their hour of need, that she ought to be grateful, but—but she felt a sense of relief when he rose and took his leave.

He came nearly every evening, and nearly always brought some present in his hand. For some time the present was always for Mr. Gordon, and generally took the inoffensive form of flowers, or some new-fashioned writing materials. He brought a patent reading-lamp one night, and a wonderful stylographic pen on another; and Mr. Gordon received them with absent-minded civility, and invariably forgot all about them or where they came from before Silas even left the house.

But one evening Silas struggled with an evident embarrassment and nervousness, and after fidgeting with his leg and beating the devil's tattoo softly on the side of his chair, he rested his elbows on the table, and bending forward to Madge, who was hard at needle-work, said:

"You've lost your brooch, Miss Madge, haven't you?"

"My brooch? Oh, yes. I think I must have dropped it in the street the other day. It is of no consequence; it was only a small silver one of little value."

"I remember it," he said. Every one of her few simple, inexpensive ornaments and trinkets was stored in his memory. "I noticed the other night that you hadn't got it on, and—and"—he slid his hand into his pocket and brought out a small case—"and I thought, perhaps, you would like to have one in its place."

He opened the case, and with a would-be careless air pushed it along the table to her.

Madge colored hotly, and she shrunk back as if the plain and simple ornament—Mr. Silas had been too shrewd to venture on diamonds—were going to bite her.

"Oh, no, no, thank you!" she said, trying to force some gratitude into her voice. "Oh, no. I—I could not take it," she added, as she saw Silas redden and then grow pale.

"I don't know why you shouldn't," he said, rather sullenly, his voice thickening. "I suppose there's no harm in a fellow giving a lady a little two-halfpenny present like that, just to show his—his friendship for her."

Madge had recovered her composure while he had been speaking. She took up the brooch and looked at it.

"It is very pretty, and it is very kind of you to think of it, but I can not accept it; and, besides, there was no need of such evidence of your friendship; you have proved it so often by your kindness to my grandfather."

Her voice softened as she looked over at the white head bent over the book; and Mr. Silas was unwise enough to think that she might relent.

"Oh, come," he said, in what he thought was a persuasive tone, "I wouldn't make a fuss about it if I were you. Just you take it, Miss Madge, just to—to please me."

Madge's face grew colder.

"I can not take it, even to please you, Mr. Fletcher," she said. "Do not ask me; pray do not ask me."

"Oh, very well!" he said, swallowing the oath which nearly rose to his lips. "Don't be angry; it's of no consequence," and he snapped the case to and put it in his pocket. "How is the book getting on, Mr. Gordon?"

The old man blinked up at him eagerly.

"A few days more," he said. "Give me a few days more!"

Silas nodded with a smile.

"I'll give you another week," he said. "I'm going to run

into the country on a matter of business, and I sha'n't be back before then."

Madge tried hard not to feel glad.

"When I come back I'll run in and see if it's finished; and if it is—well, we'll have a little dinner together at one of the restaurants. You won't object to *that*, Miss Madge?"

"Oh, no," she said, going over to the old man and putting her arm round his neck. "Grandfather will like that, I'm sure. It is very good of you, Mr. Fletcher."

"And won't you like it, too?" he said, off his guard for a moment.

"I like anything he likes," she said, quietly.

When Mr. Silas got outside he stood at the corner of Harding Street and swore for full a minute, and a girl happening to pass, he thrust the brooch in its case into her hand, with:

"There's something for you!" and hurried on, leaving her rooted to the pavement with not unnatural amazement.

He did not go into the country on business, but remained in London and although he did not visit the Gordons, he haunted Harding Street after dark with a persistence worthy of the most modern and approved of ghosts.

He could not keep away from the vicinity of the house that held that which Mr. Silas Fletcher desired even more than money.

Bad and mean men are supposed to be incapable of love. Of love in the highest and best sense of the word they may be, but of a passion which inthralls them body and soul they certainly are capable; and such a passion had got Mr. Silas Fletcher tightly in its cruel and merciless clutches.

Mean of soul, cunning and unscrupulous as he was, it is to be hoped that the reader may find a little pity for him—for he needed it.

At the end of the week he reappeared and found Mr. Gordon in a state of excitement, and Madge flushing and paling by turns with sympathetic hope.

"Ah," said Silas, as he entered the room, "I can see it is finished!"

"Yes, yes!" said the old man, tremulously. "It is finished. I have had to work hard, and—and there are several things I have omitted—"

"Oh, put 'em in afterward," said Silas, taking up the bulky manuscript—the labor, the loving, conscientious labor of years. "Bravo! finished at last! Well, now we'll go and have that little dinner, and drink luck to it. I thought you'd have it done by to-night, and I ordered the dinner on

the chance. Put on your things, Miss Madge, and let's have a jolly time of it."

Madge rose, then hesitated.

"Can you not go without me?" she said.

Silas Fletcher's face fell.

"Oh, no," he said. "Don't back out of it. It was a promise—a distinct promise."

"Very well," she said.

Mr. Gordon got hold of the manuscript and fingered it lovingly.

"When will you take it?" he said. "Not—not to-night, will you? It might get lost."

"Yes; I'll take it to-night," said Silas; and he began to wrap it in a newspaper.

"Take—take care of it," said the old man, with touching anxiety. "It has cost me many, many years. There is—oh! I couldn't tell you if I tried, how much labor and thought in—in those pages. You will take care of it, Mr. Silas?" and in his anxiety he extended his hand appealingly.

"Oh, I'll take care of it," repeated Mr. Silas. "Don't you be afraid! I'll go and see a publisher to-morrow. I know no end of them, and will soon have it out. Don't you worry about it. You trust to me, Mr. Gordon."

He put it in a small bag he had brought with him—Mr. Silas being one of those persons who hold that a gentleman ceases to be a gentleman the moment he carries a parcel of any description—and they went off to dine.

He had ordered a gorgeous dinner at Romano's, a dinner which amazed Madge and bewildered her grandfather, and which Mr. Silas himself scarcely seemed to enjoy; for though he strove to be joyous and merry, there was a sinister look in his eyes, and a line about his thin mouth which made his smile rather thin and his laughter ring false.

Even when he filled their glasses with 1880 Pommery, at a guinea a bottle, and, raising his, cried, "Here's luck to the great work!" his voice had a hollowness in it which might have startled Madge if she had not been so entirely engrossed in her grandfather.

The old man was in the seventh heaven of happiness. His careworn, wrinkled face was flushed with hope; his hands trembled as he lifted the glass; his voice faltered as he stammered:

"You—you think it—it will succeed, Mr. Silas?"

"I'm sure it will!" said Silas, tossing off the champagne.

"It will make you a famous, and, what's better, a rich man,

Mr. Gordon. I know what I'm talking about. You trust to me. Miss Madge, you've scarcely touched your wine!" And he attempted to fill up her glass.

"No, thank you," she said, drawing it away. "And—and I think we will go now. My grandfather is not used—"

She put her hand on the old man's trembling one.

Silas insisted upon their remaining until the bottle was finished—it did not take him long—and accompanied them to Harding Street, with the bag with its precious contents in his hand.

"Good-night," said Madge. "It's too late to ask you to come in. Good-night, and—and thank you, Mr. Fletcher, for all you have done for us; and, more than all, for what you are going to do for the book. Oh! I hope—I hope it will succeed!"

In her eagerness she unwittingly pressed his big, fat hand. The blood, heated by the champagne, rushed to Silas's face, and he was on the point of carrying the small hand to his lips, but, fortunately for him, controlled himself.

"Good-night," he said, hoarsely. "You trust to me!"

"Take care of it!" were Mr. Gordon's last words.

Silas drew a long breath when they had entered the house and the door had closed between them; then he went slowly home.

He had rooms in Woburn Place—three big rooms, furnished in expensive and hideously gorgeous style; furniture from Tottenham Court Road, silken hangings in hideous discord, Persian rugs and Empire chairs; gaudy pictures in the worst possible taste; and gilding wherever it could be laid on, and laid on with a trowel.

The fire was still alight. He poked it into a blaze, put on some coal, and stood by it until it had burned up; then he took the manuscript from the bag, and, tearing it page from page, threw each separate sheet on to the fire. When every particle of it was burned, and nothing remained but a heap of thin charcoal flakes, he flung himself into a chair and smiled.

"You're disposed of, anyhow," he said, with malignant satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE next morning Madge woke from a restless sleep that had been haunted by bad dreams, which she ascribed to the excitement of the preceding night.

She dressed and went into her grandfather's room, expect-

ing to find him awake and restless also, but he was sleeping like a child.

It was early, not yet seven, but she felt that it would be useless to return to her bed and woo sleep again, and putting on her hat and jacket, she was going down the stairs with the intention of taking a walk, when Mr. Gerard, the sculptor, came out of his room on the ground floor.

He started slightly and looked up at her with surprise. They had met nearly every day, either at the door or in the hall, and had always exchanged a pleasant, if formal greeting; and he now gave her "Good-morning" in his deep, musical voice.

"Are you going out, Miss Gordon?" he asked.

"Y—es," said Madge, falteringly.

"It is very early," he remarked, in a lower voice, and with true delicacy, looking away from her, for he had noticed that she was pale and agitated.

"I know," she said, with a wan smile. "But—but I have not slept well last night, and I was going to try what a walk would do for me."

"I see," he said, as he opened the door. "But it is raining."

"So it is!" she said, eying the leaden clouds and drizzling rain with truly feminine disgust, as if rain were a personal injury.

He held the door in his hand, and looked at her with grave scrutiny.

"I should like to make a suggestion," he said. "Walking about in the rain is no compensation for a bad night's rest. I've tried it, and am therefore competent to offer an opinion. You want something that will interest you—take you out of yourself."

"It would be a very wonderful thing that would do that, Mr. Gerard," said Madge, with her rare smile.

He looked at her with a kind of sad sympathy.

"Are you so unhappy, then?" he said.

"No, not unhappy," she replied, "but—but very anxious."

"That's only a form of unhappiness," he said.

He was silent a moment, regarding the lovely face with something of the grave regard which a physician bestows on an extremely interesting patient. Then he said:

"I am going to my studio. I have a model there whom I am copying by gas-light for certain reasons. Will you come

with me? It may interest you, and if it should do so, it will take you out of yourself, for a short time, at any rate."

"If it will do so for only a few moments, I should be glad," said Madge, in her direct fashion.

"Come, then," he said.

They walked round the street into the next one, and, opening a door, the sculptor signed to her to enter the studio, the glass roof of which she had so often looked down upon from her window.

Madge gazed about her curiously.

The light, coming almost entirely from above, fell upon statues in various stages, from the clay model to the marble perfection.

A lad in a white blouse stood by a bench, working up the clay with which a sculptor models.

On a kind of dais stood a girl dressed in every-day costume, but without her hat, and with a square of linen folded across her shoulders.

Gerard nodded to her gravely.

"My model," he said, in a low voice to Madge. "I am going to carve a statuette from her, which I rather think of calling 'Hope Deferred.' Look at her face," he added, in a still lower voice.

Madge looked at the girl. She was extremely pretty, but the prettiness was dignified—almost sanctified—by an expression of wistful sadness which so perfectly matched that which brooded over Madge's own heart that she felt a throb of sympathy.

"I found her by chance—quite by chance," said Mr. Gerard, in a whisper, as he showed Madge some small statues.

"I am a very lucky man. All my best models came to me by chance and unsought. Do you know, Miss Gordon—"

Madge looked up at him as he stopped.

"Yes?"

"I was going to say that if you will some day permit me to copy your face, I shall count it one of my happiest chances."

Madge smiled at him gravely.

"You shall copy me whenever you please, Mr. Gerard."

"Thank you," he said, in his grave, musical voice. He went up to the young girl, placed her in position, and, going to his rotary-table, on which stood her rough likeness in clay, fell to work.

Madge watched with a keen interest which, as he had prophesied, carried her out of herself.

While she was marveling at the skill with which he worked, at the subtle power with which, by a few movements of his dexterous fingers, he reproduced the form and features of his model, her attention was distracted by a peculiar sound in the yard opposite the studio.

The sculptor, though apparently absorbed in his work, noticed that her attention had strayed.

"What you hear is one of my men cutting a marble block into shape."

"I did not know what it was," she said.

"No?" he said, glancing at his model, and working the clay in his supple fingers. "By the sound—you know, by the way, that a sculptor can recognize each of his workmen by the sound of his mallet?"

"No," said Madge. "Is that true?"

"Quite. I'll prove it to you. I have four workmen, men who do the rough work of shaping the blocks into something like human form."

"I thought a sculptor did it all," said Madge.

Mr. Gerard smiled at her innocent ignorance.

"Consider!" he said. "It takes a man several days to hew a rough block of marble into something like shape, and while a man can be hired for three or four shillings a day, it would not pay—to use the current slang—a sculptor to waste so much time, so he employs strong, trustworthy men to shape the blocks for him."

"I see," said Madge, still intent upon his nimble fingers, and the silent, motionless model. "How stupid you must think me?"

"Not at all," he said, glancing at her with a smile, but returning to his work as if he begrudged every moment. "But to return to what I was saying. I asserted that I can tell my men by the sound of their mallets. Now, look out of the window— But stop! I'll describe this particular man, and then you shall look at him and see if I am right or wrong."

Madge smiled.

"Very well," she said. "I will not look until you have described him."

"He is a tall, stalwart man, young, and particularly handsome," said the sculptor, still working with his clay, and apparently engrossed by his work. "Although he is dressed in the rough blouse which all sculptors' 'rough' men wear, he looks a gentleman—more, an aristocrat. He has short, curly hair, dark, dreamy eyes—too dreamy—"

"Why do you say that?" asked Madge.

"Well, if I am right in my guess, it is a young fellow whom by chance—chance again, you see!—I picked up at the docks."

"At the docks?" said Madge.

"Yes," said Mr. Gerard. "Artists seek their models far and near. All is fish that comes to our net. Your true artist may find his finest inspiration in the features of street flower-girl or hawker of boot-laces. Our best pictures, our finest statues, have been painted and modeled from men and women met by chance, perhaps in the mud and mire of the slums. I saw this man—if my guess should be right: you will soon put it to the test—waiting with a hundred other men at the docks, waiting for work. I saw that he was strong, and that he was handsome, and so I engaged the poor fellow there and then. Sometimes he sits as a model, and sometimes he works in the marble-yard."

"Why do you call him 'poor fellow'?" asked Madge.

Mr. Gerard paused in his work for a moment and sighed.

"For this reason: there is something wrong with him."

"Something wrong with him?"

"Yes. Oh, no! I see what you think I mean. No; he is not insane, not in the very least. He is intelligence itself. But he has lost his memory. He remembers nothing before a certain date; the date he was put on board a ship and brought to England."

"How terrible!" murmured Madge.

"Yes; is it not?" said the sculptor, with a sigh. "As I said, he is a gentleman—more, an aristocrat—is as handsome as an Adonis, as gentle and sweet-natured as a young girl, and as perfectly intelligent respecting all present things as a human being could be; but of the past he knows nothing. It is just as if he had been born at the age of twenty. Now, look out of the window. Wait! I'll describe him again. Tall, stalwart, handsome, with dark eyes, and short, curly hair, and, in short, what one does not expect to see in a sculptor's yard—a gentleman. Now look."

Smiling, Madge went to the window. The warmth of the gas had produced a mist on it, and she had to wipe it with her handkerchief before she could see.

She peered out into the gray light of the December morning, and looked round the yard.

A young man stood in front of a block of marble, a chisel in one hand, a mallet in the other. His pose, natural and unstudied, might have served for a painter.

His face was turned from her, but as she looked he moved slightly, so that he almost faced her.

Madge looked; her eyes grew large with a strange expression in them; then she clutched at the window-frame and uttered a low cry that rang through the studio.

The face, the form, were those of Lord Norman!

CHAPTER XXIII.

MADGE uttered a faint cry and shrunk back from the window, but still kept her eyes, as if fascinated, upon the workman in the marble-yard.

And as she stared at him she felt inclined to ask herself if she had suddenly lost her senses, or had fallen asleep and had a dream. For, to her eyes, the man was still like Lord Norman in face and form.

She tried to reason herself out of the emotion which shook her. She told herself that she had left Lord Norman at Oheesney Chase, that it was utterly impossible that he could be there, beneath her eyes, clad in a linen blouse, and working at a lump of marble in a sculptor's yard. And yet the resemblance was so close, so remarkable, that it seemed impossible that the man could be any other than Lord Norman.

Mr. Gerard noticed that something was wrong, and paused in his work.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked, in his deep voice. "You seem attracted by my strange workman," he added, with a grave smile.

Madge withdrew her eyes slowly from the white-bloused figure, and, with a long-drawn sigh, seemed to wake from a dream.

"What was it you told me about him?" she said, as if she had forgotten.

Mr. Gerard pointed to a chair.

"Better sit down," he said, resuming his work, for he never forgot that his models were of flesh and blood, and capable of weariness. "I just mentioned that his was a strange case of complete loss of memory," he said. "That was all."

"Yes, I remember," she said. "And that you found him at the docks."

He nodded.

"You said that he was an aristocrat, did you not?"

"No, no; I did not make so positive an assertion. I said that I thought it very likely, judging by his face, and voice, and manner. The face is my guide, of course. However

rugged the face of a well-bred man may be, there are always certain lines that proclaim his gentle descent. We sculptors—and, I think, some painters—recognize them immediately. I believe some persons can detect these signs of good birth by the voice. It may be so, though I do not think it is so good a criterion. I have met sweet voices among the lowest of poor humanity. The face is the guide—for me.”

Madge leaned her head on her hand. She could not see the yard from where she sat, but in her mind's eye there still remained the man's form and face.

“And he can tell you nothing of his past?” she said, dreamily.

“Nothing,” said Mr. Gerard. “About the present he is as acute as the best of us—more acute than most of us, indeed. I am glad I have succeeded in interesting you and taking you ‘out of yourself,’ Miss Gordon. By the way, would you like to speak to him? I will call him up immediately I have finished this modeling.”

Madge flushed, then went pale.

“Oh, no, no!” she said, hurriedly.

She shrunk from a closer inspection of this man, who so strangely resembled Lord Norman, almost as keenly as she would have shrunk from the supernatural.

Mr. Gerard smiled, his eyes bent on the silent model, who gave no sign of having heard a word, but sat absolutely motionless in the pose in which she had been placed.

“You spoke as if you were afraid of him,” he said, casually.

Madge tried to smile in response.

“I did not want to trouble him. Why should I?” she said.

“It will not trouble him. I have fifty excuses for calling him up.”

He went to the window.

“Tut, tut! he has gone. It is breakfast-time, I suppose.”

He went back to his work, modeled rapidly for a few minutes in silence, then, with a courteous “Thank you!” assisted the model with her cloak, delicately slipping a coin into her hand, and conducted her to the door with more of gentle courtesy than he would probably have bestowed on a duchess.

Madge approached the clay model, and tried to interest herself in it, and forget the strange workman.

“It is very beautiful,” she said. “How pleased she must be with it!”

Mr. Gerard laughed.

“The model? Oh, I don't think so. Poor girl! You

don't expect her to take much interest in art. It is ~~the~~ money, the all-important money, she thinks of. Miss Gordon"—he broke off, his keen eyes resting on her face—"do you really think your grandfather would permit me to take a model of your face? Will you? I shall be very grateful."

"Oh, yes!" she said, with great promptitude. "He—and I—will be very glad if it will be of any service to you," she added, frankly and modestly.

"It will be of great service to me," he said, gravely. "I have wanted to ask you ever since I saw you first. We sculptors and painters are always eager to claim a beau—an interesting, carvable, and paintable face," he corrected himself.

But he need not have changed the purport of his sentence, for Madge was scarcely listening to him.

"Did you tell me the name of that workman?" she asked, as they moved toward the door.

"I don't think I did," he said. "It is Harry Richmond."

"Harry Richmond?" she repeated, softly. "But that is not his real name, I suppose? He has forgotten that."

"Yes, I think he has," he said, with a smile.

"But he has a knife on which the name is scratched, and so he calls himself by it—though, as he says, it is quite possible the knife may not belong to him."

"It is very singular," she said, abstractedly.

"Is it not? And now, do you feel a little less sad and low-spirited, Miss Gordon?"

"Yes, oh, yes, thanks to you!" she responded, gratefully.

"Very well," he said, "then I shall have less scruple in preferring my request to Mr. Gordon. It will amuse and interest him to watch the progress of the work, and you must bring him with you sometimes."

They left the studio and walked round to Harding Street, and the sculptor's face grew absent and preoccupied, as if he only fully lived in the studio and while at his work.

At the corner of Hart Street Madge started suddenly, and almost clutched at her companion's arm, for she caught sight of Harry Richmond walking across the road at a little distance.

He was striding along with that gait which all very strong men possess—his head high, his hands well carried. He had removed his blouse, and his figure, graceful and well knit, contrasted markedly with the other passers-by.

"There he is!" she could not refrain from murmuring.

Her friend woke up and looked round.

"Oh, Richmond? Yes; there he is. He usually takes a

turn round the square before breakfast. I have met him several times. A splendid fellow, isn't he?" he added, admiringly. "He always walks like that. I can imagine that the Romans when they were really the masters of the world had that stride and swing. He looks like the hero of a lady's novel, doesn't he?" and he smiled. "Well, here we are. Good-morning, Miss Gordon."

Madge went to her room, and taking off her hat and jacket, dropped on to the side of the bed.

She felt confused, bewildered, by the extraordinary resemblance; and amidst her bewilderment was a peculiar feeling that the workman was more like what she would have imagined the young Norman—her boy-lover—would have grown into, than was Lord Norman himself.

She roused herself at last with a start and a little quavering laugh, went to the window, and looked down upon the marble-yard. Harry Richmond was not there, and if he had been she could not have seen him, for the block of marble on which he was working was concealed from her by an angle of one of the houses.

All that day the memory of the man haunted her; and once, when in her own room, she caught herself standing still and listening to the musical chirp of the unseen chisel and mallet. Mr. Gordon went to the museum reading-room as usual, but he sat and dreamed in the capacious chair instead of reading—dreamed of the book that was to bring him fame and money.

Mr. Silas Fletcher did not turn up that or the next evening, and by the third day the old man grew sullen and even impatient in a feeble way; and when Mr. Silas arrived about his usual time, greeted him with an anxious warmth.

"All right, Mr. Gordon," said Silas, pressing the trembling hand. "I've made a start with the great book. I've sent it to a friend of mine, a publisher, and we shall hear from him shortly. We mustn't be in a hurry, you know; a work of that kind requires a little consideration, doesn't it?"

"Yes, yes!" assented Mr. Gordon. "No, there's no hurry—none at all;" but the eager expression of his face belied the words.

"And now," said Silas, cheerfully, "as it's a fine night, what do you say to a walk? The park wouldn't be bad, for there's a moon which, strange to say, you can actually see."

They went to the park, and Mr. Silas insisted upon taking the old man's arm within his, and addressed nearly all his conversation to him, leaving Madge to walk by their side and

dream. A name, however, awakened her suddenly. It was Lord Norman's.

"I had a letter from my guv'nor yesterday," Silas was saying to Mr. Gordon. "He is not a voluminous correspondent by any means, but he mentions that Lord Norman is going it pretty freely."

"Ay, ay!" said Mr. Gordon, absently.

Madge listened intently.

"Yes, the stables are being rebuilt, and some fresh horses are already at the Chase. Lord Norman has been giving some parties—shooting and dinner—and is making himself very popular."

"Then the earl is better?" said Madge.

"Yes; but he keeps to his own apartments, and only sees Lord Norman and my father. He can't speak, of course, but my father thinks that he understands—or partly understands—what is going on around him, and when he is spoken to."

"Poor man!" Madge murmured, and no more was said.

The days slipped by; two or three times a week Mr. Silas dropped in at Harding Street, and he had always a few cheering and hopeful words respecting this book. It was going on all right; there would be some delay, of course, but there could be no doubt that it would be sold and published. He offered no more presents to Madge, but now and again brought flowers for Mr. Gordon, and paid a great deal more attention to the old man than he did to Madge.

One evening, when he and Madge were alone, he remarked: "I don't think Mr. Gordon is looking quite the thing this morning."

Madge looked up from her work with a start of deep apprehension.

"Not—not looking well?" she repeated. "I—I have not noticed—"

"That's just it; you see, you see him every day, and wouldn't notice any change so quickly as I should do. He is much thinner and worn looking. I'm afraid he's worrying about the book. Don't you think it would be a good thing to take him for a change somewhere? You look at him when he comes in," he added, as the old man's slow and dragging step was heard outside.

Madge glanced at the beloved face covertly, and a sharp pain ran through her heart—a pang of alarm and self-reproach. Silas Fletcher had noticed what she had failed to

remark. She got up and put a cushion at the back of his chair, and pressed his silvery head to her bosom.

"Do you feel ill, grandfather?" she asked, in a voice of tender solicitude.

"Ill? No—no, Madge," he replied, "only tired. I get tired so soon now. I could scarcely walk from the reading-room to-day, and was obliged to rest against the railings of one of the houses."

"You must see a doctor, dear," she said, with forced cheerfulness.

He smiled wearily and shook his head.

"Not much use, Madge, unless you can find one who can prescribe the exact formula of the elixir of youth."

"Oh, you are a young man yet, Mr. Gordon," said Silas. When he rose to go he signed to Madge to follow him.

"I was right, you see," he said, as they stood in the hall. "He isn't at all the thing, is he?"

Madge's eyes dilated with sharp fear. "What shall I do?" she murmured more to herself than to him.

"Take him away for a change," he said, promptly. "Get him down on the South Coast. Hastings is the place. You think it over by to-morrow. I'll arrange everything, and—perhaps I could manage to run down for a day or two. I fancy he rather likes me, don't you know; at any rate, I'm sort of company. Good-night, Miss Madge!" And he pressed her small hand as warmly as he dared.

Madge went upstairs with an aching heart.

"Grandfather," she said, bending over him, "don't you think you would like a change?"

He half opened his eyes.

"A change? Where—why, Madge? Don't you feel well? I've fancied that you were looking rather pale these past few days. It's the London air, or want of air. Yes, we'll go away. But it will cost a good deal of money, will it not?"

"But we have plenty, haven't we, dear?" she asked.

He looked at her absently.

"I—I don't quite know," he said. "What there is, is locked up in a specimen-box in the left-hand drawer of my room. Go and see, Madge."

"Presently, dear," she said.

She waited until he had gone to bed and was asleep; then she got the tin box and returned with it to the sitting-room.

When she opened it she found it difficult to suppress a cry of consternation and dismay. There was a five-pound note,

six sovereigns, and some silver. The box very nearly fell from her hands.

Not twelve pounds between them and—and starvation! She sunk into a chair and covered her eyes with her hands.

It was all her fault! She ought to have known how much they possessed, and not have left so serious a matter to her grandfather, who, she knew, was as ignorant of money as a child.

Not twelve pounds!

She lay awake that night asking herself that question, which absorbs humanity from the first hour it is capable of thought to that in which thought closes—"What shall I do?"

Her anxiety was increased when, on going to her grandfather's room, she found him too unwell to get up. He said there was nothing the matter; he felt tired, that was all. But Madge ran over to the doctor opposite and brought him back with her.

He sat and chatted with the old man pleasantly, as if he had called to pay a social visit rather than a medical one; and he managed to keep a smile on his face when alone with Madge in the sitting-room.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Gordon," he said, in response to the anguished inquiry in her beautiful eyes. "There is nothing serious the matter—at present. Mr. Gordon is not a young man, and the sudden change from your country life has not been beneficial."

"I will take him away!" said Madge, forgetting, in her wild anxiety, the question of money.

"Well—not just yet, perhaps," said the doctor. "I think he had better rest for awhile. He has run down a great deal, and we must get his strength up." He began to write a prescription, but tore up the paper. "I'll send some medicine; and I think we'll give him some port and calves'-foot jelly, and things of that sort."

"Yes, yes!" said Madge, eagerly. "I will get them at once."

She got out one of the few sovereigns as she spoke, and turning, placed it on the table; but the doctor smilingly put it back into her hand.

"Never mind that for the present, Miss Gordon," he said, in so kindly and gentle a voice that the tears sprang to Madge's eyes. "Very few of my patients give me physician's fees. I'll send my bill in when Mr. Gordon is better."

As she sat beside her grandfather through the long, dragging day, that same question, "What shall I do?" continually

revolved in her mind. She must earn money somehow. Could she get any by copying flowers? It was work she had done for her grandfather; why should she not do it for others?

She was still pondering over it, when Silas Fletcher arrived. She went down to him, and his sharp eyes noticed the pallor and the terrible anxiety in her face.

"Mr. Gordon's worse?" he asked.

"Yes," she sighed, not noticing that he still held her hand.

"Yes; you were right. Oh, how blind I have been! He is too weak to be moved, but—but it is not serious. The doctor says that—that I may take him away presently when he is stronger; but—" Her lips quivered.

Silas watched her, and knew what the unfinished sentence meant.

"Look here, Miss Madge," he said, with an affectation of blunt good-nature, "don't you worry yourself about anything—anything. I know what you mean, and—well, I guessed there might be a difficulty. Well, that's all right. I've thought of that. If it's money you want, you needn't trouble about it any longer."

He took a ten-pound note from his pocket and laid it on the table.

Madge drew her hand away, and, white to the lips, shrunk back.

"Mr. Fletcher!"

He reddened as he had done when she refused the brooch.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Oh, I see. You think I'm offering you money. That's where you make a mistake. It's not mine; it's yours."

"Mine?"

"Yes. The publisher I sent the book to has advanced ten pounds on it. See?"

Madge took up the note and looked at it without seeing it; then, under the impulse of reaction—for we are always kindly disposed to those whom we think we have suspected wrongly—she held out her hand.

"How can I thank you?" she said, in a faltering voice. "How *can* I thank you! Mr. Silas, you are very, very good to us!"

He took the hand, and Mr. Silas himself only knows what it cost him to refrain from snatching her into his long arms. But he did manage to control himself, and merely pressed her hand as he said, with profound respect: "You've nothing to thank me for, Miss Madge. I've done very little, not half what I'd do if—you'd let me. And don't you be anxious

about the money; there's plenty more where that came from."

Madge turned her face away to hide the tears that coursed down her cheek—for there are tears of relief and joy as well as of sorrow; then she dried her eyes quickly, and forced a smile.

"If you knew how anxious and troubled I have been all day," she said. "But you can easily imagine it when I tell you that until you so thoughtfully brought this money we had only twelve pounds—or not twelve, eleven—in the world!"

"Ah!" he said, sympathetically. "You ought to have taken that hundred pounds, Madge."

She did not notice the absence of the "Miss," but turned her head away.

"No, no," she said. "We could not have taken it!"

"Just so," he assented; "and now I think I'll go up and have a chat with him. He'll be glad to hear that the book has already begun to pay."

"Yes," she murmured. "Tell him—tell him that he must try and thank you, for I can not, Mr. Fletcher."

"Mr. Fletcher," he muttered, as he ascended the stairs to Mr. Gordon's room. "It shall be 'Silas, dear Silas,' before long, my proud beauty!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE could be no doubt as to Lord Norman's popularity. It is very easy to become popular and generally welcome if you happen to be young, handsome, and possessed of a large income. And in addition to these qualifications Lord Norman was the heir to an ancient and historic title, which might become his at any moment.

To use a phrase which became a catch-word in the neighborhood, Lord Norman "woke up the country."

The Chase was transformed from a quiet, not to say gloomy, mansion, whose threshold visitors rarely crossed, into a bright and pleasant house filled with guests.

Many of the rooms had been refurnished under Lord Norman's direction; the staff of servants had been increased; modern luxuries, of which the earl knew nothing, and to which, if he had known of them, he would have been indifferent, were introduced. One of the old state-rooms had been transformed, as if by magic, into a superb billiard and smoking-room. The stables, as has been said, were rebuilding, men working by night and day; and every available place

was crammed with horses—hunters, hacks, and carriage horses. The game was now closely and rigidly preserved, and Lord Norman announced to his present party that if they would repeat their visit next year he would have really something for them to shoot.

The dinner-parties were so frequent that even the famous *chef*, whom Lord Norman had engaged at a princely salary, expressed himself satisfied. The village folk gathered round the great gate of a morning to stare at the shooting and riding-parties as they emerged laughing and talking gayly; and if one or two of the staid members of the local aristocracy—people like the Landons and Ferndales—ventured to remark that surely gayety was rather discordant in the house in which the master lay stricken, as was the earl, such comment was drowned in the blaze of popular approval.

For Lord Norman was voted by the men “a deuced good fellow,” and by the ladies “a most delightful man.”

As to the people on the estate, they were one and all enthusiastic in his praise, as is their habit toward a man who flings his money about with an open and indiscriminate hand.

Meanwhile, the earl kept to his own apartments, and whatever may have been passing through his mind was powerless to express it. Sometimes, when a burst of laughter, or the strains of a song penetrated to his seclusion, his distorted face would become more knitted, his half-blinded eyes would flash, and he would mutter hoarsely; but not a word was intelligible, and no one could tell whether he was pleased or indignant.

And yet, though he had filled the house with company, it could not be said that Lord Norman was undutiful or neglectful of his uncle. Every morning after breakfast he never failed to pay the stricken man a visit, shook him by the hand, and spoke a few kind words to him, and sometimes sat beside him for nearly a quarter of an hour. During this daily visit the earl would sit forward, clutching the arms of his chair with quivering hands, and with gleaming eyes fixed on the young man's face; but he never attempted to speak while Lord Norman was present, though the moment Lord Norman had left the room he would fall back and croak out the harsh, meaningless sounds which had now taken the place of language with him.

Very often Fletcher would spend hours in the quiet, half-darkened room, and the two old men, master and servant, would sit silent and motionless. Then Fletcher would rise, sigh, and go out, and the earl would watch him with twitch-

ing lips and eyes, in which gleamed a tender wistfulness, like that in the eyes of a dying hound.

Notwithstanding his popularity, it was generally conceded that Lord Norman had his peculiarities. There were times when, quite suddenly, and without apparent cause, the handsome face would grow dark and moody—times when the servants were not at all anxious to approach him.

They called these strange and apparently causeless moods his "black fits," and they all knew when they were coming on; for at their approach Lord Norman was in the habit of retiring to the private den he had made of the room behind the library. No one ever entered that room, excepting a servant for the purpose of cleaning it, and Lord Norman kept the keys of the costly and elaborate locks in his own pocket. In this room he kept his guns and his private account-books, a cellarette—always well supplied with wines and spirits and cigars—and a small iron safe by one of the best makers, which contained, strange to say, nothing more valuable than a small leather-bound volume, labeled "Diary," a thin flat packet, and a girl's pocket-handkerchief; treasures of apparently no great worth, but evidently considered of great value by their owner, who every night opened the safe and examined them.

But the "black fits" did not last long, and did not detract from his popularity, and the local gentry declared that Lord Norman had rendered one of the gloomy months, when it is spent in the country, into one of the most enjoyable.

There was always something going on at the Chase. It was either a shooting-party, which the ladies were asked to join at lunch-time, or a hunt breakfast, or a large dinner, and of all these functions the young viscount was the acknowledged leader. He rode straight, and shot well—indeed, there was no man in the county who could sit a horse or bring down a snipe with greater skill. He had charming manners, a voice which the ladies declared to be "quite professional," and he danced to perfection. No wonder that the women eyed him wistfully, this handsome, popular young man, heir to a peerage, vast lands, and untold wealth; and less wonder that they regarded Lady Sybil Delamoor with envious glances; for it was soon made plain whither Lord Norman's heart had fled.

Lady Delamoor and the fair Sybil were frequent visitors at the Chase, and Lord Norman was almost as frequently at Delamoor Grange; and though he had as yet made no formal proposal for Sybil's hand, it was apparent to all that he was only biding his time.

His dark eyes would rest upon the "fair wonder of her face" with burning admiration, and that look which is so eloquent of the heart's hunger; but sometimes, even as he gazed, a strange change would come to his expression—a sudden gloom and doubt—and he would turn his eyes away slowly, reluctantly.

Lady Delamoor once caught this swift change from fervent admiration to doubt and gloom, and spoke of it to Sybil.

"I don't quite understand Lord Norman," she said, in her serenely placid fashion.

"No, mamma?" murmured Lady Sybil, quite as serenely, and a great deal more languidly.

"I feel convinced that he likes you, Sybil; but at times I am puzzled by a singularity in his manner toward you."

Lady Sybil leaned back in a chair drawn quite in front of the fire, and gazed with half-closed eyes through the screen of antique stained glass.

"I think I know what you mean, mamma," she said. "It puzzles me sometimes, but I don't think it matters."

"You don't think it matters?" said her mother.

"No," drawled Lady Sybil. "I am quite content to possess my soul in patience, mamma."

And one day her patience was rewarded.

She was sitting by the drawing-room fire just before dinner, neither reading nor working, but just lying back, with her small, white, perfectly shaped hands resting in her lap—a picture, a poem, typical of indolent grace and loveliness. She had been sitting so for fully an hour, thinking—scarcely thinking, but dreaming—not of Lord Norman, but of Chesney Chase, the Chesney diamonds, the Chesney coronet, quite serenely calm, and, as she had said, possessed of her soul in patience, and was waiting with a perfect appetite for the dinner-bell, when she heard the sound of a horseman coming up the drive. She did not turn her head, even when the sounds ceased, and in their place she heard a man's firm tread on the gravel walk outside the window, and a tap on the window itself, but called out in her deliciously modulated voice: "Come in."

The window opened, and Lord Norman entered. He had been hunting, and was in scarlet, and his well-made clothes were splashed with mud and water. But Lady Sybil scarcely glanced at them; his face absorbed all her attention. It was pale and set, and the dark eyes gleamed with the intensity of a set purpose.

"I am not fit to come in," he said, standing just on the threshold of the window.

She held out her right hand, and smiled languidly.

"Come in, please; the carpet is an old one. Have you had a good run?"

He dropped his cap and whip, and stood beside her, holding her hand.

"Yes," he said. "I think so."

"You think so?" she said, with a faint smile, opening her blue eyes upon him.

"Yes. I haven't paid much attention to the run. I know we have been going like the deuce for the last three quarters of an hour; but I left them just before they killed."

"And you the master!" she said.

He had just taken up the mastership of the hounds.

"Yes, I, the master," he said, looking down at the exquisitely fair face.

"Do you want to see mamma?" she asked. "Will you sit down?"

He let his hand fall on the back of her chair, so that it nearly touched her light golden hair.

"No; I want to see you," he said, abruptly, almost fiercely.

"Lady Sybil, I have come to tell you that I love you."

Any other woman would have been startled by this sudden avowal; but not Lady Sybil: she had studied her part. Her head drooped and swayed from him slightly.

"I love you!" he said, and his usually musical voice grew almost harsh. "I have loved you since—since the night I came back. I think of you all day; dream of you all night. I love you. Will you be my wife?"

His hand slid down till it touched the golden hair, and the fingers twitched convulsively. Lady Sybil looked demurely into the fire for a moment, then she turned her eyes up to him.

"And have you left the hounds to tell me this?" she murmured.

"Yes," he said, "I have. I have been haunted all day by your face—your voice. It is a wonder that I have not broken my neck. One of my horses is staked—"

"Oh!" she breathed. "How could you! What should I have done?"

He bent still lower.

"Then—then you care for me—you love me, Sybil?" he said, meekly.

She hung her head like a modest, well-bred young lady of the very latest type.

"Yes—I love you, Lord Norman," she faltered.

He dropped on his knees beside the chair and put his arms round her.

"You—love me!" he breathed. "Sybil! My darling!"

She let her head sink on to his shoulder, and his passionate kisses rained on her face and hair.

"My dearest!" he breathed. "What can I say? Oh, my dearest!"

She was silent a moment, then she murmured:

"And—and you have loved me all these weeks! It seems so strange! Do you remember, years ago, when you were a boy, you said that you would never marry me?"

He started slightly, and for a moment his grasp of her relaxed; then he laughed shortly.

"I was an unlicked cub—a block of a school-boy," he said.

"Surely you do not keep that up against me, Sybil?"

"Oh, no, no!" she said, with a smile. "If I remember it, it is only to add to my triumph—dear Norman." She whispered the last words with a sweetness that thrilled him through and through.

"Forget them," he said. "Forget the past altogether. Love me, the man, Sybil; forget the boy."

"Yes!" she murmured. Then, after a pause: "And you have loved me all these weeks, Norman? Why—why did you not—"

"Why," he said, "because"—his face darkened, and he drew back slightly, then he caught her to him, and looked down in her face—"because I loved you so madly that I doubted you."

"Doubted me?"

"Yes; I was afraid that—that— I can't tell you. Sybil, are you sure that you love me—*me*, Norman Lechmere, the man, not the viscount and the future earl?"

She raised her eyes to his.

"What a strange question!" she murmured, with sweet wonder in her blue eyes.

"Is it?" he said. "Then what they say of women—that they love wealth and rank, and will wed anybody to secure them, is not true?"

"I see!" she said, in her soft, low voice. "Ah! you wronged me, Norman. It is you—the man—I love. What are all else to me?"

He pressed her to him, and looked down passionately into her face.

"Is that true?" he said, huskily. "Is that true? If I were"—he paused, and his face darkened—"if I were poor, without rank, a mere commoner, would you still have loved me? Think! Suppose—it is nonsense, of course—but suppose that I were not my uncle's heir, the next Earl of Chesney—suppose I were a mere nobody, poor and needy, with my way to make in the world, would you still love me, Sybil?"

"Yes, yes," she murmured, letting her head sink upon his breast. "But what nonsense you talk, dear Norman!"

"Yes; it is nonsense," he assented, hoarsely. "But, God bless you, my darling, my very own! Whatever happens I am sure of you!"

He strained her to him and kissed her passionately; then he left her, almost as suddenly as he had entered.

Lady Delamoore came in—she had, indeed, partly opened the door some minutes ago, but had discreetly retreated. "Has Lord Norman gone?" she asked.

"Yes, mamma," replied Lady Sybil, with a faint flush.

"Yes." She smoothed her hair, ruffled by her lover's passionate caresses. "He has asked me to be his wife, mamma." Lady Delamoore bent down and kissed her.

"My dear child! I knew it would come!"

"So did I, mamma," said Lady Sybil, demurely.

"And—and you have said 'yes,' and sent him away happy, dear child?"

"I said 'yes,' and I think he has gone away quite happy. He talked terrible nonsense, mamma."

"Nonsense?" said Lady Delamoore.

"Yes," with a soft laugh. "I can't repeat it—it was very foolish; but I suppose all men are foolish when they are proposing."

She paused a moment.

"Do you remember the day he refused to marry me, mamma?"

"Yes," said Lady Delamoore. "But you are not thinking of that—not bearing a grudge, Sybil?"

"N—o. But it makes my triumph all the greater, mamma, does it not?" was the soft, liquid response.

CHAPTER XXV.

"DOWNSHIRE may be congratulated on the fact that Lord Lechmere has, by his engagement to Lady Sybil Delamoore,

given the plainest proof of his desire to settle down in the county. The match is an excellent one in every respect, for Lord Norman has already become extremely popular, and promises to be an admirable type of the country gentleman, and Lady Sybil is not only one of the reigning belles, but in every way fitted for the high position which her own and Lord Norman's rank and importance in the county entitle them to."

So ran the paragraph in the principal society journal, and its sentiments were cordially echoed by all; except, perhaps, those mothers with marriageable daughters, and the daughters themselves, who had cast longing eyes on the Chesney coronet. Every one said that it was a good thing that the young lord should settle down, and a better that he had chosen a bride in his own county and from his own set.

Similar paragraphs appeared in the other papers devoted to social gossip and scandal; but Madge saw none of them, and knew nothing of the engagement; and, if she had, the knowledge would not have moved her.

The Norman Lechmere, the returned prodigal, who had shown that he had forgotten her, had passed out of her life. That other Norman, her boy-lover, who had climbed up to her lattice to exchange love tokens and plight his troth to her, remained with her, but only as a dream—a dream most vividly remembered when the ring of the mallet and chisel wielded by Mr. Gerard's strange workman rang in her ears.

She could hear the melodious sound as she sat beside her grandfather, and it recalled the scene in the small garden and every incident of Lord Norman's boyish wooing.

She had met the sculptor on the stairs or in the hall almost daily since her grandfather's illness, and he always stopped and spoke to her and inquired after Mr. Gordon. He had repeated his request that she would sit to him, and Madge promised to do so when her grandfather grew well enough for her to leave him.

He recovered very slowly, if indeed it could be called recovery, for when he regained strength sufficiently to allow her bringing him into the sitting-room, the doctor said that he was still too weak to manage a journey, and that he was "better where he was."

The old man leaned back in his chair beside the fire, and gazed into it with a kind of stupor, only rousing when Silas Fletcher paid his evening visit. Then his eyes would grow eager, and he would ask after the book in an anxious, quavering voice.

According to Mr. Silas, the book was going on all right, and in proof thereof he gave Madge several bank-notes; all advances, so he said, from his friend, the publisher.

Little wonder, seeing that his presence seemed the only thing that aroused and cheered her grandfather, that Madge grew insensibly to welcome his coming. And Mr. Silas was so watchful of himself that she took no alarm; though, careful as he was, the passion that consumed him often shone in his eyes as he ventured to glance at her face bent over her work; but Madge never happened to look up and catch the tell-tale expression, and was lulled into false security; and Mr. Silas, if not content, was patient. He felt that he was drawing the net closer, and that presently he should have her safely caught in its meshes.

One evening the crisis, so to speak, arrived. Mr. Silas came in rather later than usual, and Mr. Gordon only roused to ask a few questions about the book, and received Silas's encouraging assurances, and then sunk into his usual stupor again.

Madge arranged the cushion behind him, and kissed him.

"Do—do you think that he is getting better?" she asked, anxiously.

"Certain of it," said Silas, promptly. "I can see the improvement every day. We shall soon be able to take him to the briny."

Madge looked up hopefully, grateful for the cheering words, though, as always, the speaker's manner and voice jarred upon her.

"Oh, if I could think so!" she murmured, taking up her work, and looking not on it but at vacancy. "If I could only feel sure that he would get well and strong again!"

She brushed the tears from her eyes quickly, and tried to smile.

"I think London makes one nervous and dispirited," she said, with a faint laugh. "I shall get back my old courage directly we are in the country. And you think we shall be soon?"

He nodded.

"You can go the moment he's well enough," he said. "There is no difficulty about the—the money. You know my friend will advance—"

She looked up with a faint color in her face, a timid look in her lovely eyes.

"Mr. Silas, I—I wanted to speak to you about this money," she said. "I—I am not quite easy about it."

"I am afraid that if we go on taking these advances, there will be nothing left to receive when the book comes out, and grandfather will be heart-broken. I have an idea," she laughed, almost brightly, but still with the timidity which made her seem just intoxicatingly bewitching in Silas's eyes. "I don't have many, so that I am proud of it. I want you to tell me this gentleman's name."

"His name?" said Silas, feeling rather dry at the back of his throat.

"Yes. I want to go and see him."

"Why?" he asked, with downcast eyes.

"I have a proposal to make to him. You know I have copied all the flowers for grandfather's book, and I want to ask your friend if I can not earn some money by doing similar work for him."

"Oh, I don't think so!" said Silas. "Besides, what do you want to trouble for? You've got quite enough to do."

"No," said Madge, resolutely. "I could do that kind of work quite easily and conveniently. Why, I sit for hours unoccupied. Tell me his name and address, please."

Mr. Silas felt himself growing cold and hot by turns. The hour had arrived, and though he had looked forward to it so often, he was quite unprepared to meet it.

"I don't think it would be any good," he said, in a low voice, "but I'll see about it for you, if you've made up your mind."

"No," said Madge, with a faint smile, "I can not let you take any more trouble for me, Mr. Fletcher. I will go and see him myself. It is time that I should learn some self-reliance; we have already trespassed too much on your good nature. You know how grateful I am—"

"Are you?" he broke in, lifting his eyes for a moment, then letting them fall again. "Do you think you are? Enough not to be angry with me if—if I tell you the truth, Miss Madge?"

Madge put down her work in her lap, and looked at him.

"What do you mean? What truth?" she asked.

He leaned across the table, and fidgeted nervously with her scissors.

"I may as well tell you now," he said, with averted eyes. "The—the fact is, Miss Madge, I've—I've been deceiving you."

"Deceiving me?"

"Yes," he said, his voice growing hoarse. "Don't—don't look so hard, and for Heaven's sake don't be angry with me."

"I—I couldn't bear that. I did it for your good and his." And he jerked his hand toward the sleeping man.

"What is it you have done?" said Madge, quietly, but with a foreboding of coming trouble.

"I've deceived you about the book—I haven't sold it."

"Not sold it?"

"No," he said, doggedly; "I couldn't dispose of it. No one would take it. I tried everybody—hush! don't speak," for Madge had risen and stood looking down at him. "Nobody wants that kind of work. It's—it's out of date, and—and quite valueless. They all say it, and I've seen everybody likely to take it. Wait a minute; hear me out. Put yourself in my place. I knew how the old man—and you—were counting upon it, and I hadn't the heart to tell you the truth. I did it for the best. Own that, Miss Madge!"

But Madge scarcely heard his appeal.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" broke from her lips as her eyes turned upon her grandfather.

"Don't—give way so!" implored Silas. "It isn't so bad—"

"It—it is ruin; it will break his heart!" she moaned, more to herself than to him. Then she looked at him, her lips quivering. "And—and the money you gave us, the money you said was advanced: that—that was yours?"

His eyes fell before hers.

"Yes," he assented, sullenly, "it was mine. And what of it? There's nothing in that to cry about. I suppose an old friend—"

She broke in with a sharp cry:

"Why—why did you do it?"

Even a worm will turn. Love, and even its counterfeit—passion—will inspire the veriest coward with courage. Mr. Silas flushed.

"Why?" he said, leaning across to her. "Why? You ask me that! Can't you guess? You ought to know, unless you've been blind. I did it to please you, to make things easy for you. I did it because—because I love you!"

Madge shrunk back, breathing hard, and with an expression in her eyes which nearly goaded Mr. Silas to madness.

"I love you," he repeated, huskily. "You know that. I've loved you ever since we were boy and girl together, there at Chesney, when you used to look at me as you're looking at me now. And why! Am I blind, crippled, deformed? What's the matter with me that you draw back as if I were a kind of reptile?"

Madge put her hand to her eyes, and leaned against the table with her face turned from him.

"How do you think I could see you, and go on seeing you, without loving you?" he went on, hoarsely. "Perhaps you don't know that you're beautiful, that your eyes go through and through a man, that your voice hangs about him and haunts him day and night, and that when he loves, as I love you, he hears it in his ears even when he's asleep."

He paused for breath, and pushed his lank, straight hair from his forehead, which was wet with perspiration.

"You must have known that I loved you, that I wanted to get you for my wife. I wouldn't believe it if you said you didn't."

Madge drew a long breath, and her lips opened; but she never said a word. Yes, if she had not been blind, she must have seen it; if she had not been so wrapped up, so absorbed in her grandfather, she must have known it.

"It's precious rough on me," he said, drawing a long breath. "You can't say I haven't behaved well. I've—I've proved a true friend to him—and to you." He jerked his head toward the old man again. "And—and if you'll only listen to me, and—and promise to be my wife, I'll stand by him through thick and thin till he dies."

Madge tried to repress a shudder.

"Look here," he went on, moistening his lips. "Why can't you try and—and like me, Madge? As I said, I'm not crippled or deformed, and"—he drew himself up, for in this, the supreme moment of his life, Mr. Silas really felt virtuous and high-minded—"I'm not a bad sort of fellow. I'll make you a good husband, and—and I'll be as good as a son to him."

He knew that this was his strong card, and he played it for all it was worth.

"See here, Madge; if you don't care about yourself and what becomes of you, you might care about him, think for him."

A bitter sigh broke from her lips.

"You're—you're in a tight fix, you know; for I suppose after this you won't accept any coin from me."

She half turned to him, and her lips formed a "No!"

"Just so. Well, then, what's to become of you—him? The book is no good"—he flushed as he thought of the little heap of ashes he had reduced it to—"and there's no money in that idea of yours about copying flowers—not a penny. There's nothing you can do to earn a living. And you want

money, *must* have money for the things he requires. He'd soon go off the hooks if you knocked off his port and jellies, and the rest of it. And where's the money to come from to take him to the sea-side when he's fit to go?"

She was silent. Her heart ached with anguish, but through her aching rose and grew the woman's desire for self-sacrifice.

Women as beautiful and young as she sacrificed themselves for rank and wealth. Why should she not sacrifice herself to save the life of the old man she loved so dearly?

Silas, watching her face with keen and burning eyes, marked the changes in it, and following his suit, so to speak, pushed his winning card under her eyes.

"Just think, Madge," he went on, coming a little closer. "We'll take him away from this beastly London. We'll go and live in a little cottage with flowers all about it. He'll soon pull round in the fresh air. And as to the book; why, I'll publish it—we'll publish it at our own expense. He need never know. And perhaps it will be a success, after all! Think of it, Madge. Marry me, and all will go right, your grandfather will get better, and we shall all be happy."

His voice broke, for he was deeply in earnest, was this mean-souled villain, and he ventured to touch her arm with the tips of his long fingers.

It was an unfortunate thing to do, for, at his touch, Madge's spirit rose in revolt. He nearly lost her forever.

"I—I can not!" she panted, her hands strained together, her head thrown back.

"Very well," he said, almost inaudibly. "You—you know best. I'm sorry that you hate me so much, that even to save his life—for that's what it comes to—"

"His life!" she panted.

"Yes," he said, doggedly. "I will soon prove that. Knock off his port and other luxuries—"

"But I can work! oh, I can work!" she answered.

Mr. Silas laughed, a jarring, quavering laugh.

"What at?" he said. "Not you! You couldn't earn five shillings a week—to save your life and his! Look here, Madge," he went on, wisely repressing the desire to draw nearer to her, to touch her. "Let's understand each other. I don't ask too much. I—I know you don't love—care for me yet. I don't expect, I don't ask that. All I want is that you'll give me a kind of promise to try and like me, and—be my wife. That's all I want. After all, it isn't much. I have put up with that all the time—"

"But—but I didn't know," she breathed, despairingly.

"All right. Pretend you don't know now. Let's go on as we were. I'll be satisfied, or try to be. And—and presently you'll get used to the idea of marrying me, and—" He broke off, and caught at her arm. "Do you hate me so much that you'd rather see him die than marry me?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"No, no!" she gasped. "I—I can not let him die! I—I will do as you ask me. Only—only—give me time! You said that I knew, but I did not! I—I did not. I thought you did all you did as a friend. Only give me time—please give me time!"

Mr. Silas's face cleared.

"I will—I agree," he said. "Don't—don't you upset yourself. You'll get used to the—the idea soon. Think of the old man, and how happy we can make him. I'm a rich man—shall be a very rich man before I'm done. He shall have everything he wants, and—"

His hand slid down her arm to her hand, which he carried to his lips, and kissed fervently. Then, like a wise man, he left her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NEXT morning, as Madge was coming in from her modest marketing, she met Mr. Gerard in the hall. He stopped, and took her hand.

"I am glad to see that you have been out," he said. "It proves that Mr. Gordon is better. But you look pale and weary," he added, with his keen glance. "Do you want 'taking out of yourself' again?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Madge, with a sad smile and a sigh as she thought of last night's scene with Silas, and all she had promised.

The sculptor looked at his watch.

"Then come round to my studio after lunch and sit to me," he said. "Nothing cheers us up so much as doing a good turn to a fellow-creature."

"I will come if grandfather is well enough for me to leave him," she said; and with a nod he passed on.

In the afternoon, leaving Tilda in charge, she went round to the studio. The sculptor was at work, and the girl whom she had seen on her previous visit was sitting to him. She turned her eyes slowly, impassively, on Madge, but took no further notice.

"I shall not be many minutes," said Mr. Gerard, without looking from his work.

Madge went to the window. The workman, Harry Richmond, was in the yard, not working at the moment, but moving a huge mass of marble on a trolley.

Madge looked at him with something like superstitious dread. The resemblance to Lord Norman, which she had often, since she had first seen him, tried to persuade herself was a mere fancy on her part, forced itself on her still.

She stood and looked at him, marveling at the strange, extraordinary similarity in their faces and figures, and had almost lost herself in dreamland when Mr. Gerard spoke to her, and, turning, she found the model had gone.

"It was kind of you to wait," he said. "And if you will sit there, with the light on this side of your face—" He placed her quickly and deftly. "Thanks. Will you be very angry if I fail to do even slight justice to you, Miss Gordon?"

"Very," said Madge, with her sad smile. "Why should you think that I am vainer than the rest of my sex?"

He looked at her for a moment in silence, then he said gravely, and with averted eyes:

"I think you are the least vain of any woman or man I ever met."

Madge smiled again.

"Do you pay compliments to all your models, Mr. Gerard, or do you only do so when you want them to look pleased?"

He laughed, his short, brisk laugh.

"It depends," he said, enigmatically, his dexterous fingers already at work with the clay. "Don't talk for a few minutes."

"I can sit silent for hours," said Madge.

His hands stopped instantly.

"Then please let me know when you are going to begin."

Madge laughed at this quick retort, and the sculptor bent his brows and regarded her with a curious touch of despair.

"You make a very perplexing and difficult model, Miss Gordon," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because you have so many moods and so facile an expression. A minute or two ago I was going to represent you as 'Resignation,' and now"—he shrugged his shoulders—"well, 'Sunshine after Rain' occurs to my mind. You see, we must keep to our catch-penny tricks. There is nothing the dear old stupid public likes so much as 'a good title.' It is more than half the battle. No one will glance at a 'Portrait of Mr.

Smith,' but call it 'A Modern Hero,' or 'A Nineteenth Century Knight,' and everybody will rush at it. Oh, now, please smile again, or I shall have to make you into a 'Deep Thought.' "

He chatted on, beguiling her out of herself, and working with almost stealthy rapidity. He had never had a model one half so lovely, so full of charm as this sad-faced girl, with the smile and the laughter always so ready to break through the clouds; and he was in a fever of eagerness to get her into the clay.

He worked so absorbingly that for once he almost forgot that his model was human and capable of weariness, and he was awakened to the fact by a sudden sigh from the half-parted lips.

He started and looked at her.

"You are tired?" he said, with self-reproach.

"No, no!" she cried. And indeed the sigh was not an indication of weariness; it was drawn from her by the sound of the chisel and mallet which just then rang out upon the silence.

"I feel sure that you are," he said. "See, now, take a turn or two up and down the studio, and then come back. You will feel rested. I can not let you off for to-day, for—well, I have caught the idea, the ideal rather, and am loath to leave off."

"Indeed I am all right," she said; but she rose obediently and walked to the other end of the long room. As she stood looking at some statuettes, the door opened, and a tall figure in a blouse entered.

It was Harry Richmond. Madge instinctively, with a kind of fear, drew back until she was almost hidden by a full-length statue.

The man held a piece of marble in his hand, and walked straight to the sculptor.

"This block is bad," he said.

At the tone of his voice Madge's hand went to her heart as if something had pierced it. It was the voice of the boy—Lord Norman—grown into a man's.

"What did you say, Richmond?" asked Mr. Gerard, looking up.

"The block is too faulty to work," said Harry Richmond. "It is full of flaws, and—" he stopped in the middle of the sentence, his eyes fixed on the clay model with a strange expression in them.

"What is the matter? Do you like it?" asked Mr. Gerard.

At the same time he made a slight gesture with his hand to keep Madge from advancing.

"It is very beautiful," said Harry Richmond. His voice was low and gentle, a dreamy, far-away look stole into his dark eyes. "Very beautiful! Is it a fancy sketch, or is it from life?"

"Which should you think?" asked the sculptor.

"I don't know," was the reply. "It is a face one might dream of, and yet—" He stopped and passed his hands over his eyes, which had not left the clay model since they first fell upon it.

"And yet?"

"I—I seem to know it," was the response, spoken in so low a voice that Madge could hardly hear it. "I suppose it is one of the models I have seen here."

"No, I think not. And if it were, you would not have remarked her. You never notice any women, do you, Richmond?"

He shook his head.

"No," he said, quietly; "they do not interest me. Since I lost my memory all women are alike to me."

He raised his eyes with a sad smile for an instant, then they dropped back to the clay model again.

"But this interests you, does it not?" asked the sculptor.

Harry Richmond passed his hand over his brow; it was a shapely hand, though so strong and used so unsparingly.

"Yes," he said in the same low voice, and with a half-painful glance at the sculptor's face, as if he were dreamily asking what it meant.

"That is strange," said Mr. Gerard, thoughtfully.

There was silence for a moment, then he said:

"This is the model of a young lady, a friend of mine, who lives in the same house. Would you like to see her? I think you shall. You can give me your opinion of the likeness; you have a good eye, Richmond."

He signed to Madge to come forward. For a moment she hesitated; then she slowly moved toward them.

The man called Harry Richmond turned at the sound of her footsteps and looked at her; and as her eyes met his, Madge had hard work to repress the cry that rose to her lips.

For there, as it seemed to her, stood her boy-lover grown into glorious manhood.

Something in her face, almost as pale as those of the statues around her, startled him, for his eyes flickered as if under a sudden flash of midday sunlight, and he took half a step for-

ward. Then he stopped and looked from the lovely living face to the copy in the red clay.

"Well?" said Mr. Gerard.

A solemn silence, which seemed to stifle Madge, brooded over the studio. She felt as if she were dreaming.

"It is very good," said Harry Richmond. "Yes, it is like. It is—" he stopped, and his hand went to his brow again. "Will you tell me your name?" he asked, and his voice, though quiet enough—it trembled slightly—had the peculiar ring of unconscious command, which Madge remembered in Lord Norman; always the boy, Lord Norman.

She answered with difficulty, for her heart was throbbing with the emotion which this awful resemblance caused her.

"Yes," she said. "It is Madge Gordon."

"Madge—Gordon." He repeated the name softly, slowly, his eyes fixed on her face.

"Have you ever heard the name before?" asked the sculptor.

He started as if he had forgotten Mr. Gerard's presence, then, with so sad an expression, so sad and wistful, in his eyes that it went to Madge's heart, he shook his head.

"No," he said. "I have never heard it before."

Madge drew a long breath.

"I have told this lady something of your story, Richmond," said Mr. Gerard.

"Yes? It is a strange one, is it not?" he said, with a faint, grave smile.

"It is a very sad one," Madge faltered, and now the tears sprung to her eyes.

He looked at her with the same wistfulness.

"You are sorry for me!" he said, with a touch of grateful wonder. "You must have a gentle heart, Miss Gordon. But do not cry, please," he added. "It is not worth that. Oh, nothing is worth that! Besides, I am not"—he paused, and the word that followed came rather reluctantly—"unhappy."

"Miss Gordon knows what trouble is, and is therefore sympathetic," said Mr. Gerard, stealthily working at the model, quite unremarked by the other two. "She is anxious about her grandfather, with whom she lives alone, and whom she loves very dearly. He has been very ill—is ill still."

"I am very sorry," said the deep, grave voice, more gently even than before. "He has been ill? Do you—do you think—" he paused, with a great, strong man's shyness.

"Well!" said the sculptor.

"Do you think he would let me see him?" faltered

Harry Richmond. "Sometimes sick people like to see and talk with a stranger."

Mr. Gerard glanced up from his bust at Madge inquiringly. She pronounced a "Yes!" with her lips.

"Miss Gordon thinks that he would," said Mr. Gerard.

A look of pleasure flashed across Harry Richmond's face.

"When may I go?" he asked.

Madge looked at the sculptor, and he smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You may go now as far as I am concerned," he said, with an artist's brusqueness. "I have finished with you to-day," addressing Madge, "and if I had not, it would be of no use your staying, for your face has taken to itself as many varied expressions as there are motes in a sunbeam. Perhaps Miss Gordon will let you go with her now, Richmond."

"Will you?" he asked, with suppressed eagerness.

"Yes," said Madge. "My grandfather will be glad to see you."

He strode across the studio into an inner room, and Madge followed him with her eyes, then sunk into a chair.

Mr. Gerard regarded her with a smile, a rather curious one.

"You seem to have taken to one another," he said. "At least, he is unusually friendly with you. As a rule, he is barely civil to your sex. No, that is not true, either, for he is as courteous as a prince, but it is cold courtesy, nothing more. You are not afraid to go with him?"

"No, no; oh, no!" said Madge, in a low voice.

And indeed there was not a touch of fear of him in the conflict of emotions his presence aroused in her.

"You have no need to be. As I told you, he is quite sane—"

"Oh, yes! yes! yes!" Madge murmured, almost indignantly.

—"And he is as true and gentle—well, as a true gentleman, and there is nothing truer or gentler."

Harry Richmond re-entered the studio at this moment. He had washed his hands and face, changed the blouse for his jacket, and looked simply a gentleman in a morning suit of rough tweed.

He stood hat in hand, erect, patient, courteously waiting till she should rise; and when she did so, he bowed to Mr. Gerard, and opened the door for her to pass out.

"To-morrow, if Mr. Gordon is well enough," the sculptor called after her.

They went into the street, and walked on in silence; Harry Richmond looking straight before him with a line o.

deep thought on his brow. But that he was not dreaming or lost to the consciousness of her presence was made manifest to herself. At the corner of Hart Street, just as Madge was about to step into the road, a hansom cab dashed round with all a hansom's wild recklessness. Out went Harry Richmond's hand with the swiftness of a hawk, and held her back.

"Thank you," she murmured. "I wonder more people are not run over than there actually are."

"There are quite enough as it is," he said. "Do you go out alone often?"

She could feel his dark eyes resting on her as she answered:

"Yes, always. I have no one but my grandfather, and he is too ill and weak to leave the house."

"Quite alone?" he said, almost to himself.

"You, too, are alone," she found herself saying, ere she knew it.

"Yes," he smiled. "But that is different; I am a man, and can take care of myself."

"And I, too, though I am a woman," said Madge.

He looked at her with wistful admiration—but an admiration very different to that which Madge remembered glittering in the eyes of Lord Norman the night of his return to Chesney Chase.

"Yes," he said, "I can believe that you are full of courage. But, all the same, it is not good to be alone, I know. I have been solitary for so long. I have no friend in the world but Mr. Gerard. He is a fine fellow, is he not?"

Madge assented in a low voice. Every word this strange man uttered seemed to wake an echo in her heart. She found herself longing for him to go on speaking to her.

"How crowded the streets are! Do you like London?"

"No," said Madge, with a faint shudder. "But it is a grand place, and I can well imagine some persons being proud of it. But I know so little of it. I have always lived in the country."

"Yes," he said, looking at her with deep interest. "Will you think me intrusive if I ask where?"

"In Downshire, at a place called Chesney Chase," she replied, lifting her eyes to his face as if she expected to see him start and exclaim with surprise; but after a moment of apparently deep thought, he said, quite calmly:

"It is a pretty name. I have never heard of it before."

Madge sighed with an unreasonable feeling of disappointment.

"Why did you sigh?" he asked, with quiet sympathy.

Madge flushed.

"I—I do not know. This is where we live."

She opened the door with her latch-key, and he followed her up the stairs.

Mr. Gordon was lying back in his chair, with his eyes closed.

"'E's been asleep most all the time you've been away, Miss Madge," began Tilda; then she stopped to stare, open-mouthed, at the tall, handsome stranger. "Lawks, miss—"

Madge colored and smiled.

"I see you have got the tea ready; will you bring another cup, Tilda?"

Tilda returned—almost backward; and Madge flung her jacket and hat on the couch, and went to the fire to see to the kettle.

Harry Richmond followed her, and, pushing her hand gently back, said:

"Allow me, please. May I?" He lifted the kettle and poured the water into the tea-pot in the most approved fashion. "Not too much water at first," he said.

Madge looked up at him.

"You are quite an adept," she said.

"Am I? Well, I have lived alone so long, you see. Now, it must stand on the hob for just three minutes, must it not? Let me put it there, please." He looked round the room. He had not, as Silas would have done, made a minute inventory of it the moment he entered. "How pretty and comfortable it is," he said, with a faint sigh, and rather to himself than her; "one would know at a glance that a lady reigned within it. Oh, I beg your pardon!" His eyes fell, and the color rose to his tanned face. "I do beg your pardon most humbly. I am so used to talking to myself for want of a better listener, that—"

"There is no need to beg my pardon," she said, all her being throbbing at his low-spoken words, his deep, musical voice. "See, my grandfather is waking."

The old man stirred and opened his eyes, let them wander from one face to the other unintelligently for a moment, then he clutched the chair, and, leaning forward, exclaimed, with feeble energy and indignation:

"What—what does he do here? Lord Norman?"

Madge turned pale, and putting her arm round him, drew him gently back to his cushions.

"Hush, hush, dear!" she whispered. "It is a mistake."

This gentleman is not Lord Norman. His name is Richmond."

The old man gazed at the handsome face for a good minute, then gradually doubt took the place of dislike and anger, and he closed his eyes.

"I thought it was Lord Norman. I—I beg his pardon. How do you do— What name did you say, Madge?"

"Richmond—Harry Richmond, sir," said the young man. "I am sorry I startled you. Miss Gordon was good enough to permit me to call on you. I will go and—"

"No, no!" said the old man, with quivering voice. "Don't go. Stay, please. We—we have so few friends. Stay. He may stay, Madge, eh?"

Almost unconsciously Madge held out her hand, as if in appeal, and Harry Richmond inclined his head consentingly.

"What was it he called me?" he asked her, in a low voice. Her lips quivered.

"Lord Norman—Lechmere," she said, looking up at him as she knelt beside the fire to reach the toast.

He repeated the name quite calmly, but with a slightly puzzled frown. "But why?" he asked.

"I—I don't know!" she faltered. "He has been ill, and is still weak, and sometimes he wanders when he wakes suddenly, as now."

She paused a moment.

"You—you never heard the name before?"

"Of this Lord Norman—what was it—Lechmere?" he replied. "No, never!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

HE presently took up his hat to go, but Madge asked him to stay to tea. They sat down, and she noticed that he was perfectly self-possessed, with the modest calm of a gentleman, and was not at all awkward or embarrassed, as an ordinary workman might have been under the circumstances. He was indeed calmer than herself; for a wave of strange excitement—half pleasurable, half painful—was thrilling through her.

She could feel his dark eyes, with their gentle melancholy, watching her as she poured out the tea, and her hand trembled, and the color came and went in her face, accentuating her beauty.

"And who is this Lord Norman— I beg your pardon, but I have forgotten his name again," he said.

"Lechmere," she replied, with downcast eyes. "He is a gentleman whom we once knew."

"He would not feel flattered by your grandfather's mistake," he said. "A nobleman would not care to know that a poor sculptor's workman had been mistaken for him."

"Are you so poor?" she asked, scarcely knowing what she said, for still the tones of the musical voice startled and confused her.

He laughed, evidently not a whit offended by her question.

"Well, no; not if 'Poor and content is rich enough,' be true. I earn thirty shillings a week, and that, to a solitary man whose wants are few, is sufficient. I live in a little attic on the other side of the water—lodgings are cheaper there—and, as I said, am content. This," he glanced around admiringly, "is a palatial apartment, luxury itself, compared with it."

He didn't explain that he lived in an attic, and on short commons, because a large portion of his earnings was distributed among his poorer neighbors; but Madge, who had learned how far thirty shillings will go, divined it instantly, and her lovely eyes glowed as they glanced at him.

"And do you not find it very dull?" she said.

He thought a moment.

"Yes," he replied, "very; and mostly when I turn in for the night. While one can walk about—and I spend nearly all my spare time on the tramp through the London streets—one can keep loneliness at arm's-length. How glad you must be to have some one for whom you care, Miss Gordon!" And he looked with a strong man's smile of sympathy at the worn old man busy dozing in his chair.

Madge's eyes grew moist.

"Yes, he is all the world to me," she murmured, "and I am happy while I have him."

Then he turned and spoke to Mr. Gordon, and the old man roused a little and answered him; but it was plain that he had forgotten his name, or how he happened to be there.

Tilda came and cleared the tea-things away, and Madge got out her work, but it lay forgotten on her lap as she listened to Harry Richmond. He talked of all sorts of things, but of nothing that was not connected with London, she noticed. He told her about the hard work of the docks, related anecdotes respecting the poor people, his neighbors, explained to her the difference between the various kinds of marble; and,

When he rose to go he looked round wistfully.

"Is it too much to ask that I may come again, Miss Gordon?" he said, in a low voice.

Madge felt a thrill of pleasure, but, perhaps, because of that thrill, looked down and seemed to hesitate.

He colored under his tan. "It is too much," he said. "Forgive me! but"—he paused a moment—"you will think it presumptuous of me, but I can't help feeling that we are not quite the strangers our slight acquaintance makes us. I"—he put his hand to his forehead for an instant—"I feel as if we were old friends. I fear that now I have sinned beyond even your forgiveness!"

"No, no," she said, almost inaudibly. "Yes; please come again; my grandfather will be glad to see you."

He held her hand; it seemed to her that his strong one pressed it, but in her agitation she could not be sure; and then he went. She sunk into a chair and covered her eyes. No work was done that night.

Harry Richmond strode through the lamplit streets to his attic on the south side of the river. The blood was tingling in his veins. The lovely face of Madge Gordon floated before him like that of a spirit, making beautiful the murky streets, filling him with a kind of reverential joy and gladness, mingled with an aching longing.

Was it possible that he had only seen her for the first time that day? Surely not! Surely he must have known her for a long, long while, and had kept her image hidden away in his heart. Now and again people who passed him stopped and looked after him admiringly, and with a sort of wonder, for the handsome face was all aglow with the emotions that possessed him.

Presently a child—a little bit of a boy, one of the thousands of waifs and strays that float on the dark tide of the Great, the Joyous, the Sorrowful City, limped after him, and begged, and Harry Richmond, when at last he heard the faint, thin voice, came down from the clouds, and picked the child up in his arms; for to-night his great heart was overflowing with tenderness.

"My poor little man!" he said, in a voice that filled the child with self-pity, "are you all alone in this great place? All alone and hungry, eh?"

"Yes, I'm hungry. Give me a penny," said the child, whimpering.

Harry Richmond emptied his pockets of their small wealth, and put it into the dirty little claw.

"There you are!" he said, cheeringly. "Hold on to it tightly. Run home now and buy some supper."

Half terrified by such generosity, the waif sped away with bare and noiseless feet, and Harry Richmond strode on. He was full of happiness, that was yet not perfect joy—so full that he felt as if the attic were not large enough for him to breathe in. So he paused at the door of the gloomy house, and walked on. Presently he got his pipe out, and finding himself out of tobacco, he walked abstractedly into the nearest tobacconist's, to find that he had not a penny in the world.

"Never mind," he said, with a smile, to the shopman, and he put his pipe back in his pocket quite contentedly.

There was no supper when at last he climbed to his attic; but he could not have eaten if a lord mayor's banquet had been awaiting him. His heart was too full of this new and indescribable *something* that had come into his life to permit him even to sleep for a time, and it was dawn before he fell asleep, with "Madge!" upon his lips.

The sculptor's workman, the man who had lost his memory, was in love at last!

The next day Mr. Gerard sent up word, asking Madge if she could go round and sit for him, that he might finish the model, and Madge went round in the afternoon.

"Oh, I thought you would have come in the morning," said Mr. Gerard, as he opened the door to her. "My paid model is here—the young woman you have met, you know. I shall have finished with her in half an hour; it is her last sitting."

"I will go away and come again at the end of that time."

"No, no," he said, anxiously; "that means that you will forget all about it. I know you women! Go into the yard and choose the marble you would like. Harry Richmond is there and will help you. He knows as much about it as I do."

In his eagerness to get back to his work, he almost pushed her down the steps leading to the yard, and Madge, though she would have withdrawn if she could have found any excuse ready, descended.

Harry Richmond was working at a block of marble, and did not hear her footsteps or see her until she stood close beside him. Then he turned, started, and in a very unworkman-like way dropped both mallet and chisel. He stooped to pick them up—and the exertion, slight as it must have been, made him very red—then raised his hat.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Gordon. You—you startled me. I was thinking—I mean I did not expect to see you, and—"

"Mr. Gerard has sent me to choose the marble for my bust," she said, with a meekness unusual for Madge, and with downcast eyes.

Harry Richmond nodded quickly, and looked pleased.

"Yes! we will soon do that! At least," he corrected himself, "it will take a little time. It will want consideration." He gazed at her thoughtfully. "Yes, it must be the purest white Carrara! The purest!"

He looked around the yard, went to and examined some blocks, and presently returned to her with one on his shoulder.

Madge looked at him with wide-open eyes.

"Is it not very heavy?" she exclaimed.

He smiled as he set it carefully down at her feet.

"I am rather strong," he said, almost apologetically. "There is the piece! It is the best in the yard. I will cut it into shape at once;" and he caught up his chisel and mallet. Then he paused. "I wish I could carve it!" he murmured, wistfully.

"Are you anxious to be a sculptor?" asked Madge, trying to meet the direct gaze of his dark eyes, and failing.

"No," he said; "I never had the desire till now; but it is a vain desire," he added, sadly. "I have kept this block for some special work of Mr. Gerard's; he will be glad."

"Why?" said Madge, innocently.

He looked at her and then fixedly at the marble.

"His whole soul will be in his statue of you," he said, in a low voice. "He has never done anything better than your model in clay; I looked at it again this morning. I am going to ask him—" He stopped and bit his lip.

"What are you going to ask him?" Madge asked. She had seated herself on a slab of stone, her hands clasped in her lap, her lovely face turned up to him.

Before he answered, he picked up his coat and, signing to her to rise, laid it on the stone.

"Oh, no, thanks!" she said.

"Do, please," he pleaded. "It is too dusty a seat."

"You have not told me what you are going to ask Mr. Gerard."

He held the mallet aloft, and looked straight before him.

"I am going to ask him to let me have the clay model of you," he said, almost timidly. "He breaks up most of them; but I think—I hope—he will give me yours."

Madge looked down, and was silent for a moment. The stroke of his mallet made sweet music.

"It must be very hard work," she said, after the pause, during which she had been watching him with a woman's admiration of strength.

He thought for a moment.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said. "It was hard at first. To-day I have to work rather harder than usual."

"Why?" she asked, with as much interest as if the fate of an empire hung upon his answer.

"I was late this morning," he said. "I did not sleep until dawn, and I have to make up for lost time."

She also had not slept till dawn. Their common wakefulness seemed to create a sympathy between them.

"Do you often get tired?" she asked, her dark-gray eyes lifted to his face.

He laughed.

"Never, or scarcely ever," he replied. "I am very strong, as I said. How is Mr. Gordon to-day?"

"My grandfather is just the same," she answered.

"I was afraid that perhaps my visit had disturbed him," he said.

"Oh, no," she replied.

"Then may I come again?" he almost murmured.

"Yes," she said.

He worked on, talking as he worked, and Madge had grown quite unconscious of the flight of time when Mr. Gerard appeared at the top of the steps and called to her.

"Bring that block up here, Richmond!" he cried,

Harry Richmond took the marble on his broad shoulder, and followed Madge up to the studio.

"Chosen a piece? Let me see," said the sculptor.

"Humph! the best piece in the yard, isn't it? Well, it can't be too good."

Harry Richmond passed into the studio, the block of marble on his shoulder, and as he did so the young woman, the paid model, who was going out by the door leading to the street, turned.

Her pale, care-worn face went whiter than the marble itself, and as she shrunk back against the half-opened door she uttered a sharp cry, her eyes fixed upon Harry Richmond with the mass of stone upheld by his muscular arms.

"What is the matter?" said Mr. Gerard, with a frown; for your artist objects to the expression of emotion—unless it serves his purpose. "Are you faint, my girl?"

The girl put her hands to her eyes for a moment, then let them drop, and gazed fixedly, searchingly at Harry Richmond. He stood as calm and motionless as one of the statues, a grave surprise and pity in his handsome face.

"She has sat too long. She is tired," he said; and, setting down the block of marble, he poured out a glass of water from a jug and took it to her.

"Drink this," he said.

She took it with trembling hand, and looked up at him with the same fearful, anxious scrutiny. Then she sighed heavily and raised the glass to her lips.

"You—you don't know me?" she whispered.

He looked at her with brows bent thoughtfully.

"No," he said. "That is, I have seen you here once or twice—"

She put the glass down with a sigh, drew her thin shawl round her, and went out.

Harry Richmond turned to the others with a question on his lips; but the sculptor had placed Madge in her proper pose, and had evidently quite forgotten his last model and her slight fainting fit.

Harry Richmond stood looking on for a few minutes, then, as if remembering that he was wasting his master's time, reluctantly and with a sigh went back to the yard again.

Mr. Gerard worked with the absorption of a genius.

"This is going to be one of my best bits of work," he said, almost to himself as he washed his clayey hands. "Yes, I'm in luck! There will be at least one statue with a lovely face in the next Academy."

He was so absorbed, so fully in the seventh heaven—the artists' heaven—that he let her go without a word—in fact, scarcely knew that she had gone. Madge glanced toward the yard as she left the studio. Harry Richmond was still at work, and the chisel and mallet rang its wonted music.

When she reached home she found Silas Fletcher awaiting her, and the sight of him made her start guiltily. She had forgotten him! Yes, clean forgotten him. She could not raise her eyes to his face as he pressed her hand and stared at her with his passion-laden eyes.

"Sorry I couldn't come last night, Madge," he said. "Fact is, I was kept at the office till late. I'm one of a 'corner' in cotton. There! you wouldn't understand me if I tried to explain it. But if we can pull the thing off properly it will make a man of me! I shall be next door to a hun-

dred-thousand-pounder! Think of that! You'll ride in your carriage and pair, Madge, mark my words!"

"Is that Mr. Silas?" cried Mr. Gordon, feebly, awakened from sleep by the unmusical voice. "How—how is the book getting on? I want to see the proofs."

"Oh, the book's all right, getting on stunningly," said Silas, carelessly. Then he turned to Madge. "I've had a letter from the gov'nor. My lord! but things are going it at the Chase. Lord Norman's got engaged to Lady Sybil Delamoore, of the Grange. It's in all the society papers."

"Yes?" said Madge, gravely. She was thinking at the moment of Harry Richmond, the man who strangely resembled Lord Norman. She felt that she ought to tell Silas Fletcher of her acquaintance with him, but she shrunk from doing so, shrunk painfully.

"Yes, it's a big match. He owns, or will own, half the county, and she's one of the real swells. But I don't envy them. She's as cold as ice, and he—well, he's got the devil's own temper."

"I hope they will be happy," said Madge, almost inaudibly.

"Oh, yes, so do I. At least, I don't care. But it's evident he's head over heels in love. What do you think he wants?"

Madge smiled gravely.

"Why, he wants a bust of her. My gov'nor has written up to me about it. I'm to find out a sculptor—one of the best—and send him down regardless of expense. That's just like the swells, isn't it?" he remarked, contemptuously. "A city man would ask the price first, and make a proper contract for it. But Lord Norman is too high and mighty for that. I've got to find a man and send him down at once, post haste, and regardless of the cost."

Madge thought of Mr. Gerard.

"There is a famous sculptor lives in this house," she said.

"Does he?" exclaimed Mr. Silas, pricking up his ears.

"Oh, come, now! He can't be very famous, or he wouldn't hang out at such diggings as these."

"But he cares nothing for luxury," said Madge, "and he is a great sculptor."

"Is he?" said Mr. Silas. "Well, I'll see him, and see if we can't come to terms. Of course," with a cunning gleam in his eyes, "I shall want my commission."

"Your commission?"

"Oh, never mind; you don't understand business," said Mr. Silas, with a laugh of tolerant contempt. "I'll see to it! Leave it to me. All's fish that comes to the net of a city

man. But isn't Lord Norman going it! The gov'nor says that the money is flying like leaves in autumn—quite poetical, isn't it? Nothing's good enough for the young lord; and the old man—the earl, I mean—sits there like a stuffed mummy, and can't say a word. Enough to make a fellow laugh, isn't it?"

Then, glancing at Madge's sad, grave face, he dropped the subject.

"You—you haven't forgotten our bargain, Madge?"

"No," she said, faintly; then she looked up at the vulgar, commonplace face—the face which was so true an index of the vulgar, commonplace mind—and tried to tell him of Harry Richmond.

But it seemed like sacrilege, and—she could not.

"I'll look that sculptor fellow up at once," he said, a little later on. "From the little I know of Lord Norman, and from my gov'nor's letter, I should say he's not the man to stand any delay. The worst of it is," he added, as he held Madge's small, cool hand in his big, moist palm, "that I've got to go down there to-morrow. It's a beastly nuisance, and—and I shall miss you, Madge. I wish I could think you'd miss me!"

Madge tried, honestly tried, to respond to the lovelorn look and tone, but her heart rebelled, and Mr. Silas had to be content with her gentle "Good-bye" as he marched down the stairs in search of Mr. Gerard, the famous sculptor.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

To put it in the slang of the day, Lord Norman was, though in a highly decorous manner, "painting the county red." The Chase had been filled all through the Christmas with a very large and an exceedingly "gay" party—a party which delighted in very late dinners, baccarat until the early morning, and breakfast consisting principally of grilled bones and curry.

It was a party that rode hard, played hard, flirted hard, and if it did not drink hard was only restrained from doing so by fear of losing its last thread of reputation; but as it consisted of the very *crème de la crème* of "smart" London society, and was as full of titles as a hedge is of blackberries in September, the world—even the quiet world of Downshire—had not a word to say against it, but was quite willing to dine, hunt, and dance with it.

And of this gathering of smart and choice spirits Lord Nor-

man was the very soul. The young heir to Chesney Unase and the earldom seemed mad—mad with the pride of youth, the consciousness of wealth and strength, and, most of all, mad in his love for Sybil Delamoor.

He seemed indeed intoxicated with happiness, so much so that Lady Delamoor was startled out of her limp serenity into a remonstrance.

"I—I am afraid Norman is—is rather wild, Sybil," she said one day, just after the young lover had ridden away, with flushed face and glittering eyes, urging his high-spirited horse into a mad gallop, down the Grange avenue.

Lady Sybil looked after his fast-retreating form with a smile of conscious power and gratified vanity.

"Because he rides hard, mamma?" she said.

"Because—well, because he does everything 'hard,' " murmured Lady Delamoor, gravely. "He is terribly excitable. The other night, after dinner, he looked so—so strange that I thought—really I thought—he had had too much wine."

Lady Sybil smiled.

"I know. He read your thought in your face, and told me of it. He had not had too much wine. He said"—she paused and smiled again, but without a trace of shyness—"he said that it was because I had been sitting next him, and he was thinking that I should soon be his."

Lady Delamoor looked shocked.

"Really, Sybil?"

"Well?" she returned. "What is there so dreadful in that? I should hate a lukewarm lover. I am rather cool myself."

"Yes!" assented Lady Delamoor, with a sigh.

"And one loves one's opposite, you know. Do not be afraid, mamma. Norman will settle down when we are married, and be as staid as even you can desire. At any rate, you won't expect me to find fault with him for being very much in love with me."

She paused a moment, then laughed softly.

"Have you heard of his last freak?"

"No!" said Lady Delamoor, with a glance almost of alarm.

"What is it?"

"Nothing very dreadful. He is going to have a bust of me carved. Heaven only knows how many of my portraits he has already; but he says that nothing but my face in marble will satisfy him."

"It is—it is absurd!" said Lady Delamoor. "I shall speak to him, and try and dissuade him from the idea. No

one has a statuette carved until after she is married, and only then if she happens to be a celebrity."

"Well, and am I not a celebrity?" said Lady Sybil, raising her exquisitely penciled brows, and looking down at the fair and rather troubled face by the fire with icy hauteur. "Is there not a paragraph devoted to me in each number of the society papers? Doesn't all the world know of my engagement, the exact number of the wedding presents, and what my gowns are going to be?"

Lady Delamoor sighed.

"Sometimes," she faltered, "sometimes, Sybil, this engagement, much as I desired it, almost frightens me. He—he is so wild and reckless, and—and—I can not forget the poor earl, shut up in his room, speechless and powerless amidst all this gayety."

Sybil shrugged her shoulders.

"Norman can't help his uncle's illness. The earl was once young himself, I suppose, and knew what it was to be in love," and she glanced significantly at her mother.

The pale face of the elder woman flushed, and she averted it hastily.

"At any rate, I object to this idea of the bust," she said, faintly.

"Your objections come too late, dear," Sybil murmured in her languid tones. "Norman has just told me that the sculptor is coming down to-night, and that you and I are to go over to the Chase to-morrow, to give the man a sitting. He is a famous sculptor—I forget his name—and Norman has given him *carte blanche*. It is to be exhibited in the next Academy, and will, so Norman says, create quite a sensation. He says that it will be the most beautiful—" She broke off into a laugh. "But you will not care to hear his 'lover's flattery,' will you, dear?" And nestling into one of the softest chairs, she took up a book, as if the subject were exhausted.

Norman had spoken truly, for at that moment Mr. Gerard was at the inn. He had declined Lord Norman's invitation to stay at the Chase during the progress of the bust.

"I know what that means," he said, as he sat beside the fire smoking his old brier pipe, as much beloved as it was burnt—which is saying a great deal. "It means living a life of gilded slavery in the company of men and women who either treat you with open disdain, or a patronage which is worse than the coldest scorn. Besides, I can not work with

people looking on who know nothing of art, and yet persist in chattering the most arrant rubbish about it."

The companion he addressed was Harry Richmond; for just before he was starting Mr. Gerard had called out of the window, and told him that he wished Richmond to go with him.

Harry stared, and did not look overwhelmed with joy, for in an instant he reflected that leaving London meant leaving—Madge.

"What is the matter?" said Mr. Gerard. "Have you grown so fond of London streets and fog that you can't bear to tear yourself away for a few days?"

"I will go," said Harry; and an hour afterward he had been ready to accompany his master.

"I don't know that I've much use for you now I've brought you," said Mr. Gerard, as they sat in the train. And he laughed absently. "But, any way, you can prepare the clay, and help keep the idiots off me. Tell them, if they want to talk, that they may talk to you; that I'm stone deaf—'stone' is distinctly good—or that I bite if spoken to much."

"Very well," Harry Richmond had responded. He had been looking out of the carriage window as the train had whirled along; looking out with a grave thoughtfulness, and Mr. Gerard had asked him what he was thinking of.

"I was wondering whether I had ever lived in the country," he had replied.

"You don't remember?"

"No," was the reply. "But," he had added, almost to himself, "perhaps I may some day."

"Some people would give all they possess to lose their memory as you have done, Richmond," Mr. Gerard had remarked cynically.

Harry Richmond had been very thoughtful all through the journey, and he was still silent and preoccupied as the two men sat before the fire in the inn parlor and smoked their pipes.

"I wonder what this young lady is like?" queried the sculptor, presently. "Not nearly so beautiful as—as the bust I have left at home," he added.

Harry Richmond knew that he meant that of Madge, and he colored swiftly.

"Why did you leave it?" he said, gravely. Mr. Gerard pushed his hand through his thick iron-gray hair.

"Why? Well, for several reasons. One, because that vulgar city fellow—what was his name?—Fletcher—offered me

a large sum, any sum indeed, to come down; and we artists love money like other people; but the strongest reason was—" He paused. "Do you know what happens to men who cut diamonds? Sometimes, when they have a large stone of extraordinary luster they grow so absorbed in it that they get lost and are in danger of becoming mad. Then the manager of the works takes them off that big diamond and sets them to work on smaller and duller stones, and they recover their sanity. That little bust was too big a diamond to me, Richmond. Don't be uneasy," he laughed, grimly, as Harry Richmond moved in his chair and frowned at the fire with a suddenly troubled face. "The poor diamond-cutter knows all the time he is in love with the stone that it never can by any possibility be his; and I have known the same of Madge—Miss Gordon. She is worthy of a younger, a better man than this grizzled old sculptor, and the grizzled old sculptor knows it. Don't sigh like that, man, or you'll put the fire out;" and he laughed again and eyed the handsome face curiously.

Before Harry Richmond could speak—if he had been going to do so—the girl of the inn brought a note to Mr. Gerard.

He opened and read it, then tossed it across the table to Harry.

"Lord Norman," said the note, "will be obliged if Mr. Gerard will come up to the Chase this evening, and confer with Lord Norman respecting Lady Sybil Delamoore's bust."

"Will you go?" asked Harry.

"I certainly will not," said the sculptor, leaning further back in his chair and stretching out his legs. "I would not leave this fire to-night at the bidding of a king—unless it were the king of sculptors or painters. I'd toil through the blackness of a Siberian forest for either of them any night. But I do not leave here for any mere son or nephew of an earl. Besides"—and he sent out a volume of smoke with a look of contemptuous indifference—"what the devil does he mean by 'confer'? I have come to sculp, not to confer. If, when I have done the thing, his serene mightiness doesn't like it, he can leave it."

He turned to the girl, who stood open-mouthed and fingering her apron, in a delicious condition of awe and admiration, for to her Lord Norman was a kind of demi-god.

"Tell the messenger that Mr. Gerard is in bed—or dead—which you like! And bring us in another mug of this old ale. But wait—stop!" he exclaimed. "If Lord Norman wants to 'confer,' why shouldn't he 'confer' with you, Richmond?"

Yes, you shall go! I see you are shocked at my rude independence."

"I go?" said Harry Richmond. "What good could I do?"

Mr. Gerard laughed. The idea tickled him, and he stuck to it. "Kings and queens have their ambassadors; why shouldn't a sculptor have his? Yes, you shall go. Tut, man! I can see you are dying to do so. Get your hat and coat, and see this sprig of nobility, and talk to him; you know enough of the jargon to do that. Tell him—oh, tell him what you like, but let him fully understand that I have come to sculp, not to confer. Confer!" And with a grunt he refilled his pipe, and settled himself deeper into his chair as if he never meant to leave it, or as if only dynamite would force him from it.

Harry Richmond hesitated; but only for a moment. It was his place to obey. He put on his overcoat and hat and went outside. A groom was standing by the door drinking a glass of hot grog. He touched his hat.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

Harry Richmond nodded, and they started. It was rather a dark night, but still light enough for them to see their road, and they walked on until they came within sight of the Chase.

The many windows blazing with light startled Harry Richmond from his reverie—a reverie in which the principal—indeed, the only—figure was that of Madge Gordon! He looked up surprised and interested.

"Is this the house?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, respectfully. "It's a fine place, isn't it?"

"It is," said Harry. "Is anything out of the ordinary going on there? There seems so much light and music," he added, for as they ascended the steps the sound of a violin and a piano floated out to them.

"Oh, it's only the usual thing," said the groom, carelessly and with a touch of pride. "His lordship's got a big party staying at the Chase. They've just had dinner, and are enjoying themselves with a little music. Presently they'll take to card-playing, and keep it up till morning. After that, those of 'em who haven't thought it worth while to go to bed will get some grilled bones, and be out with the hounds—there's a meet to-morrow morning—and you may bet your life Lord Norman will be one of 'em."

Harry Richmond looked round with unabated curiosity and interest. The place seemed a palace even to him, accustomed as he was to the large houses of London.

"He must be very rich, this Lord Norman," he said, rather to himself than to the groom; but the man heard him.

"Rich! I should think so! There's no end to the money. He'll be the richest man in this county, and any other, for aught I know, when the earl dies."

"The earl?" said Harry.

"Yes; his uncle. He's up there." He pointed to some dimly lighted windows on the first floor. "Paralyzed or something of that sort. Here we are," he broke off as they reached the hall. "You go in, sir, and send up your name. I mustn't enter the house by the front way."

Harry stepped into the hall, and looked around. Its vast size and air of antiquity struck him, and so absorbed him that he forgot the business that had brought him there until a footman, in the rich livery which the servants had worn since Lord Norman's reign, came forward and eyed him expectantly—expectantly, but yet respectfully, for there was the unmistakable sign of the gentleman in the tall, slight figure and handsome face.

"Lord Norman wishes to see me," said Harry Richmond. "At least—well, say Mr. Gerard; his lordship will understand then."

He turned as he spoke to look at a magnificent palm standing near a man in armor, and so brought his face into the light. The footman started.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed.

Harry Richmond turned to him with grave surprise. The man recovered his composure as if with an effort, and, still eyeing the handsome face covertly, said:

"This way, sir."

He showed Harry into Lord Norman's private smoking-room, and closed the door.

Harry looked round. Following Lord Norman's instructions, Robins had converted the once dingy room into a comfortable den. It looked what it was, a private snuggery, and Harry Richmond noticed that all the doors were double—that is, one of wood and an inner one of baize—and that the single window was covered by a curtain of heavy velvet. A lamp, turned down very low, lighted the room but dimly.

"Lord Norman likes to be quiet sometimes," he thought. "Only sometimes," he added to himself, with his grave smile, for the footman had left the inner door of baize open, and a peal of laughter penetrated to the room.

A moment or two afterward he heard a quick, firm step,

the door was thrown open, and a young man in evening-dress entered.

He stood for a moment looking round in the semi-darkness, then with a "Curse the idiot! why didn't he turn up the light?" he went to the table on the other side of which Harry Richmond stood, and turned up the lamp.

Then saying: "How do you do, Mr. Gerard? Awfully good of you to—" he raised his eyes to Harry Richmond's face.

The civil greeting died away, the handsome face lost its reckless flush and became suddenly pinched and livid, the dark eyes distended until the whites showed all round the pupils, and with a cry of horror he clutched the table to prevent himself from falling.

"My God!" burst from his pallid lips; "I—I must be mad or—drunk!"

He staggered toward the door, looking over his shoulder at Harry Richmond's surprised face, as if he meant to fly from some specter; then, with an oath and a wild, mad laugh—a laugh of desperate defiance—he flung himself against the door and confronted his visitor.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LORD NORMAN set his back against the baize, or inner of the two doors, and glared at Harry Richmond like a wild beast turned to bay and prepared to fight for his life. His face was livid, his eyes starting. Of speech he was incapable.

Harry Richmond looked at him with grave surprise, mingled with a strange feeling that worried him. It flashed across his mind that he had seen this young nobleman before, but he could not remember where. In a better light he would have noticed the resemblance between them; but the lamp was not turned up fully; and, besides, Lord Norman had changed during these past months of luxurious living and dissipation. His face had grown coarser, and was, of course, clean shaven but for the mustache.

Harry Richmond was the first to speak.

"You sent for Mr. Gerard, the sculptor, my lord," he said.

At the sound of the grave, musical voice, calm and self-possessed, instead of trembling with anger and indignation, as he had expected, Lord Norman started and threw his head forward to stare still more fixedly. Could it be possible that this man was *not* the man he had left for dead in the hut at the out-station? Or could it be possible that he should be

Harry Richmond and yet not remember his would-be murderer?

Lord Norman covertly wiped the sweat from his brow.

"I—I did," he said, in a low voice. "Are—are you he?"

Harry Richmond smiled slightly.

"No, my lord," he said. "I am only Mr. Gerard's workman."

Lord Norman drew himself up and took a short step forward, keeping his face out of the lamp-light.

"Why did he send you? Why didn't he come himself?" he asked, vainly trying to speak naturally, and still keeping a close watch upon the other.

Harry hesitated a moment, then he said, candidly:

"It is late, and Mr. Gerard is tired. I hope that I may be able at least to convey your lordship's wishes to him."

"Humph!" said Lord Norman, drawing a long breath.

It was wonderful! If this were Harry Richmond, he should have flown at his—Lord Norman's—throat long before this.

"I should have preferred to see Mr. Gerard himself," he said; "but no matter. I—I—"

He paused, and still keeping in the shadow, went to the cellaret and poured out a glass of spirits, and drank it.

"Will you have anything to drink?" he said.

Harry Richmond declined courteously. This young nobleman's manner rather astonished him, just as his voice and face worried him with a vague recollection.

"No, thank you, my lord."

Lord Norman went back toward the door.

"All I wanted to tell Mr. Gerard was that I wish him to devote the whole of his time to this bust of Lady Sybil"—he paused at the name and looked hard at Harry Richmond; but the handsome face, the steadfast eyes, showed no sign of recognition—"of Lady Sybil Delamoore until it is finished. I am aware that such a request is somewhat unusual, but I make it all the same, and am quite prepared to pay Mr. Gerard his price for my monopoly of his attention."

"I will tell Mr. Gerard," said Harry Richmond. The voice rang in his ears and aroused a strange repugnance. "I presume you wish the bust to be of heroic size and in classic form, my lord?" he said.

Lord Norman nodded. He could scarcely follow the sense of the words, in the agitation of his dread and amazement.

"Yes, yes," he said. "Lady Sybil Delamoore's face will lend itself to the classic style. I suppose Mr. Gerard will be

prepared to commence at once? Lady Sybil will be ready to sit to him to-morrow morning."

"Yes, I think so," said Harry, but with a slight hesitation; for he knew that if Mr. Gerard happened to be disinclined to work, not all the noblemen or noblewomen in England would prevail upon him to touch clay or chisel. "I will tell him. What time in the morning, my lord?"

Lord Norman took out his watch with a trembling hand, and in a moment of forgetfulness bent his head to look at it. The lamp-light fell upon his white face; Harry Richmond saw it plainly for the first time. Something seemed to go straight to his brain—something like a hot shaft of flame that lighted up with a lurid glare the dark obscurity of the past—lighted it up so suddenly and fiercely that the mental vision could not for the moment pierce it.

But the light had broken in upon the darkness; the mists were beginning to dispel, the veil to uplift.

"At noon," said Lord Norman. "If that hour will suit Mr. Gerard, ask him to let me know."

Harry Richmond did not move or speak, but stood on the other side of the table, one strong hand clutching its edge with the grip of a giant—a blind giant, struggling, praying for light.

"I think that is all," said Lord Norman. "You are staying at the inn, I suppose?"

He meant to follow this man—this image or ghost of the man he had left for dead—follow and watch him stealthily.

"At the inn," said Harry, in a thick voice.

"Ah, yes. I am sorry Mr. Gerard did not accept my invitation; but artists, especially famous ones, are terribly independent and—er—proud. By the way, I may want to see you again—but no doubt you will accompany Mr. Gerard to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Harry Richmond.

The voice had grown deeper. There was a note in its bass tone which sounded like the first rumbling of a lion's roar; but the other, in his agitation, did not notice it.

"Very good," he said. "I think that is all I have to say."

Still Harry Richmond did not move. The mists were rolling rapidly away; the light was coming—a light that almost blinded him and drove him mad.

Lord Norman moved toward the door, but, with his hand almost touching the handle, paused. The awful desire to hear the man's name overpowered him.

"What—what is your name, may I ask?"

With a roar the magnificent figure sprung across the table, and the strong hands had gripped Harold Thane's throat.

He had no time to call out, to utter the faintest, shortest cry, but went down like a felled ox—went down as Harry Richmond had gone down under *his* in the hut. There he lay with white face upturned, his eyes starting, his lips chattering; and above him was the terrible face of his past victim.

"My name!" came not loudly, but with fearful intensity. "My name! It is Harry Richmond! *No! It is the one you have stolen*, thief! I am Lord Norman Lechmere, and you are Harold Thane! Thief! bush-ranger! impostor!"

At each word the steel-like grip tightened on Thane's throat. Thane caught at the hands that were swiftly choking him, and tore at them frantically.

"Spare me—spare me? Don't—for God's sake, don't kill me!" he gasped.

The two eyes glared down at him.

"Why not?" came the fierce response—"why not? You tried to kill me. *You have killed me!* I have been dead—dead—since the night you played the murderer! Kill you? Yes, I am going to kill you. What does a man do when he finds the viper that has bitten him in the dark? He sets his heel upon it and crushes it—crushes it! You viper that bit the hand that fed you—ay, and saved your vile neck from the hangman's rope! Why should I spare you?"

"For God's sake—for your own sake!" screamed Harold Thane, gurgling in his throat, already growing black under the pressure of the vise-like fingers.

Norman Lechmere's—for we give him his proper name now—broad chest heaved, and the breath came hot and fast.

Heaven only knows how terrible was the temptation to take the man's life, to wreak a just vengeance upon the coward and thief who had stolen his name and place in the world—so terrible as to be, for the moment, almost overwhelming.

But he mastered it. For at the instant, the critical stroke of time which stood between Harold Thane and eternity, there flashed upon Lord Norman the vision of Madge's face, there rang softly in his ears her beloved voice.

No; for her sake, he would stop short of murder. Murder? No, not murder—justice!

Slowly, reluctantly his grasp relaxed. He rose and stood over the prostrate villain, and set one foot on his chest.

"Lie there!" he said, hoarsely. "Move an inch, and I will kill you!"

Then a shudder ran through him as he looked at the white

face so fearfully, cruelly like his own. He could see the resemblance again now, for the light fell full upon it.

A groan burst from him.

"Oh, God! that there should be such a villain! Are you a man or a devil? Did I save your life when you came to me like a starved hound? Did I save it again when those you had robbed and wronged were on your track? Or was it all a dream? Dream! I have been living in a dream since then. You tried to kill me; but you did worse than take my life. You robbed me of *myself*—my memory!"

The blood-shot eyes stared up at him from the white face.

"I—I," gasped Thane, "I swear I didn't mean it—plan it! It—it was done in a moment! You—you taunted me; you were hard on me; you treated me like a dog!"

"A dog!" burst from Lord Norman's lips; "and what were you? What are you but a dog? You wrong the sorriest cur that lives when you call yourself by its name. To rob and leave for dead the man who had succored you! Is there in all nature a beast so vile as you?" He stooped with outstretched hand, as if to take back the mercy he had extended.

"Spare me! Spare me, for God's sake! I will do anything you want. I will confess; I will restore—"

The deep voice broke in upon the stifled whine.

"Restore! Can you restore all these past months of death in life? Can you give me back the past? Restore!" He laughed, a laugh that made the wretch beneath his foot shudder, for it sounded like a knell in his ears.

"I will do anything," he moaned, hoarsely. "I will confess my guilt to-night—now—only spare my life, and—and let me go. For God's sake, take your foot away!" The dry voice grew faint, the distended eyes closed.

Lord Norman removed his foot slowly.

"Get up," he said. "Go there—out of my reach." He pointed to the couch.

Harold Thane rose painfully, and with a groan crawled to the sofa and dropped on it, his trembling fingers feeling his bruised throat. He shook so that the couch shook under him; his teeth chattered, his livid face was wet with sweat.

Lord Norman paced up and down the room, his hands opening and shutting spasmodically. He had scarcely yet realized the truth; the mist which had obscured his memory had not quite cleared off; but gradually the past was coming back to him like a series of dissolving views, vague at first, but gradually growing plainer and more distinct.

He remembered his visit to the Chase, and—yes, Madge—Madge and the small garden; and “Robinson Crusoe;” and, ah! the handkerchief; the lock of hair, for which he had exchanged his penknife; and the parting under the window.

His dear child-love, Madge! Great Heaven! And she and Madge Gordon, the woman in London whom he loved with all a strong man’s overmastering passion, were one and the same! His heart throbbed, his eyes glowed; he almost forgot the miserable wretch, the thief, impostor, cringing and shaking on the sofa, forgot the wrong he had done him. That thought of Madge swallowed up all else for the moment.

He went to the sideboard and poured out a glass of water; but as he raised it to his lips he remembered Harold Thane had drunk out of it, and he flung it into the fire-place.

It fell with a crash that startled Thane and made him cower, for he thought that Lord Norman was going to attack him again.

Some one else heard the noise of the falling glass. Mr. Silas Fletcher had been taking a stroll along the garden-path outside the smoking-room. He stopped and crept up to the window, but the shutters were shut. The quietude inside the room following the crash made that astute gentleman curious. He left the window, and throwing away his cigar, tried the door leading directly into the room. It was unlocked, and very slowly and carefully he opened it about half an inch and looked in.

Cool and audacious as was Mr. Silas Fletcher, the sight of Harry Richmond, Lord Norman’s double, nearly caused him to cry out. With trembling eagerness he crouched down, and holding the door ajar, listened with a heart that bumped against his side so violently that he thought it must be heard and would reveal his presence.

Lord Norman drank some water from a clean glass, then drew a long breath and faced the shrinking Thane.

“My uncle—where is he? Is he dead? No, or you would have stolen his title as you have stolen mine! Where is he? Have you imposed upon, deceived him?”

“The earl is ill. He has had a paralytic stroke,” said Harold Thane, huskily. “Yes, he believes that I am—”

He hung his head. Lord Norman ground his teeth.

“And all the others?” he said, bitterly. “Have they all of them believed you? Have they none of them eyes, sense enough, to detect a villain masquerading as an honest man?—a thinly veneered rogue passing himself off as a gentleman?”

Thane shook his head, with a sickly smile of triumph.

"They've all believed in me," he said. "You—you see, we are so much alike."

"Alike!" His hands clinched. "Yes," he admitted, with a groan, "we are. But was there none who could see beneath the surface—none?"

He was thinking of Madge, but he would have died rather than have spoken her name in this vile wretch's presence; it would have been sacrilege.

Thane looked up.

"There was one—Madge."

He winced as Lord Norman strode toward him threateningly.

"Don't let her name pass your lips if you still set any value on your life!" he cried.

"She—she suspected, I think; but she has gone. She—she left—"

"I know! I can see it in your face! Some devilry of yours drove her away. Oh, God! give me patience with him!" he muttered, hoarsely. "Listen to me. I can scarcely keep my hands off you. I shall do you an injury yet if you are under my eyes much longer. I ask you no questions. I can guess how you have worked this scheme. You—stole my diary and—and other things." He could not bring himself to mention the lock of hair and the handkerchief. They had always been sacred to him. They were as old relics now. "Give them to me—give them to me, quick!" and he extended a threatening hand ominously.

Thane struggled off the couch.

"They—they are upstairs in my room," he said, with a hang-dog look. "I will go and get them."

Lord Norman struck him with the back of his hand on to the sofa.

"You shall get them presently. I will go with you. Was there anything else you stole? You see, I don't remember," he went on, with a terrible calmness that made Thane shake. "When the men from the head-station came to relieve me they found me unconscious in the hut you had intended for my burning tomb. They nursed me back to life; but that coward's blow from behind—you cur!—had injured my brain. My memory was gone. I had forgotten my real name—forgotten everything!" A groan of indignation and agony burst from him against his will, and once again Thane trembled for his life. "So"—with a long breath—"I do not know what else you took. All, I suppose?"

Thane hung his head, not with shame, but fear.

Lord Norman smiled grimly.

"All I had then; and all I had here you have stolen since. You shall give them back! Yes, everything; all but the black months of dead memory; those you can not restore. Get up!"

Thane rose, supporting himself by the arm of the sofa, and thrust the wet hair from his forehead.

Lord Norman listened.

"You have a party to-night?" he said, grimly. "All your friends—no, *my* friends!" He laughed fiercely. "Who are they? Quick!"

Thane huskily gave some names.

Lord Norman put his hand to his brow.

"Yes, yes, I remember. They all come back to me. At last, at last! Who else? Is—is Lady Sybil Delamoore here?"

Thane inclined his head. He had heard Lady Delamoore's carriage roll in as he stood talking to "Mr. Gerard's workman."

Lord Norman laughed grimly.

"And you have deceived her, too. Ah!" for he read the truth in Thane's shrinking eyes. "You—you devil! You have got her to promise to be your wife!" He strode forward with extended hand, but let it drop; he could not touch the wretch except to kill him. "Open the door!" he said, sternly. "Take me to them and tell them the truth. Go to them and say: 'Here is the real Lord Norman. I am an impostor, a thief, with a price upon my head. This man whom I robbed and tried to murder—this man who fed me when I was starving, and helped me to escape my just deserts—this man is Lord Norman Lechmere.' Come, quick! For your own sake, don't hesitate or delay, or I'll not answer for myself. God only knows what it costs me to show you any mercy!"

Harold Thane staggered to the door and unlocked it; then he turned his white face and blood-shot eyes upon the man who was once his victim, but was now his Nemesis.

"And—and afterward?" he asked, hoarsely. "You—you will have mercy on me? You won't give me up? You'll give me a chance?"

"Afterward," said Lord Norman, grimly, "I mean to hand you over to the police."

Thane started, and his face went livid.

"The police—with the Australian record against me!" he gasped. "You'd—you'd better strangle me as you were going to do just now! Richmond, for God's sake, pity me!"

And he flung himself at Lord Norman's feet and clung to his knees.

Lord Norman struck his hands away.

"Your touch is pollution!" he said, fiercely. "You ask too much! Well— But get up, or the grain of pity I have for you will die out. Get up, and lead me to these people. Tell them the truth—all the truth—and I—I will give you twenty-four hours' grace. Not another word! It's the most you'll ever ring from me, and in yielding that I'm wronging the world by leaving such a villain free to pollute the air breathed by honest men! Get up!"

"Twenty-four hours!" muttered Thane.

He got up and opened the door.

"Must I—must I tell them all?" he asked, hoarsely.

"All!" said Lord Norman. "They will all be astonished, but they will find no difficulty in believing it. For all your fine feathers, Thane, you look a rogue and a vagabond now." He glanced at the white face and blood-shot eyes, the livid lips, and hair dank with sweat. The beautifully cut evening clothes were torn, the spotless shirt-front creased and wrinkled, the collar torn from the stud at one end, and the neat white cambric tie untied and twisted into a knot. Thane looked like a drunken billiard-marker masquerading as a gentleman.

"Let me—let me put myself straight," he whined.

"No! Go, this moment!" and Lord Norman pointed to the door.

With an oath, Thane opened it and passed out.

Lord Norman walked close by his side, but not touching him. They traversed the hall. Robins and a footman were passing at the moment, carrying some tea on a salver, and Robins stopped for a moment and stared at his disheveled master with the tall, handsome man who so strongly resembled him; then, with a frightened face, hurried on. They reached the drawing-room door, and as Harold Thane paused to wipe the sweat from his face, Lord Norman looked round. Memory was coming back to him, and on a full flood-tide. The place seemed so familiar to him that he marveled that he could ever have forgotten it. The drawing-room door was open, and he saw a crowd of ladies and gentlemen, the shimmer of rich dresses and the glitter of jewels. Some one was at the piano—it was Lady Sybil—and the sound of the waltz she was playing joined with the murmur of voices and laughter. The blood came to his face, the fire to his eyes. Yes, he remembered it all. *There*, in that magnificent room, was his right place; he was Lord Norman Lechmere, heir to the

lordom of Chesney. Instinctively, his head, never very low, raised itself, his breath came quickly, and he was walking in, self-possessed, conscious of his right, when suddenly Thane flung himself upon him and shrieked, wildly, "Help! help!"

CHAPTER XXX.

LORD NORMAN, off his guard, was taken at a disadvantage, for Thane's clutch at his throat was that of the strength that comes of recklessness and despair, and Norman staggered slightly. Then he seized Thane, and the two men swayed to and fro in a fierce struggle, Thane all the time shouting for help. The piano ceased, the women shrieked; but so sudden, so unexpected was the sight and sounds that met their eyes and ears that the crowd of guests stood and stared transfixed for a moment with astonishment. Then a couple of gentlemen near the door flung themselves upon the struggling forms; others followed suit, and in another instant Lord Norman was torn from Thane and thrown on the ground. Amidst the screaming and shouting, the rushing to and fro of the servants, no voice could for a time be heard; but presently Lord Landon, a powerful man, raised his voice and called to Thane, who leaned against the wall, breathing hard and wiping the blood and perspiration from his face.

"In God's name, Lechmere, what does it all mean?"

Thane pointed a shaking finger at his foe, now held prostrate by a dozen hands.

"Hold him! Keep him off me! Don't—don't let him rise! Save—save me!"

"We have him all right enough!" said Lord Landon, with impatience and amazement. "But what does it mean? Who is he?"

The crowd closed round, gazing with astonishment and curiosity, first at Lord Norman and then at Thane.

"Great Heaven! how much they are alike!" whispered some one; and the whisper ran round.

Thane struggled for breath.

"That—that scoundrel is a thief and a murderer!" he said, hoarsely.

Every one started and stared at Lord Norman, who by this time had struggled to his feet, but was held immovable by Lord Landon and three other gentlemen, who had twisted his arms behind his back and gripped them there.

"What!" exclaimed Lord Landon.

"He is a thief and a murderer! His name is Thane—Harold Thane!"

Lord Norman started and his eyes flashed, but he uttered not a word.

"Thane—Harold Thane!" repeated Thane more distinctly and deliberately as he regained his breath. **"I knew him in Australia. We were together at an out-station. I—I saved his life when he was starving, and—I'm ashamed to say—helped him to escape from the police, who were after him; and in return the hound robbed me of my savings and tried to murder me!"**

A shudder of horror ran through the crowd, and the men murmured indignantly.

But one or two, Lord Landon among them, looked hard and curiously at their prisoner. It seemed to them that his face and the quiet composure which he displayed were scarcely those of a thief and desperado.

"The night he fled from the hut in which we were living," continued Thane, **"he stole behind me and struck me on the head with a spade. I have the mark now. Then he dug up our common stock of gold and bolted with it, leaving me—the man who had saved his life—for dead, and penniless! He is a viper who deserves to be hanged—and he shall be!"**

Thane paused for breath, and with shaking hands tried to arrange his collar and shirt-front, but still kept his eye on the white, stern face of his adversary, as if he feared that Lord Norman would break loose and reach him, notwithstanding the many hands that held him.

Lord Landon looked from one to the other.

"It is a strange story," he said, gravely.

"Yes; such ingratitude is almost incredible," replied Thane; **"it is inhuman. If you remember"—**he looked round, and his glance fell upon Lady Sybil, who stood in the front circle of the crowd, looking from him to Lord Norman—**"if you remember, Sybil—and you too, Landon and Lord Ferndale—I tried to tell the story of this man's villainy the night of my return to the Chase."**

"Yes," murmured Lady Sybil, **"and you broke down, Norman. Oh! you remember, do you not?"** and she looked from one to the other.

Lord Landon nodded.

"I remember it distinctly," he said.

"The fact is—I am almost ashamed to confess it," said Thane, as if reluctantly—**"but I was attached to the scoundrel; I liked him. Perhaps it was because of the resemblance**

between us. Anyhow, I had forgiven him, and had tried to forget his perfidy."

A murmur of sympathetic admiration for such generosity ran through the circle of ladies, and gleams of indignant reproach were cast at the prisoner.

Lord Norman said not a word, but stood immovable as a rock, with white, stern face, and eyes that seemed to pierce the fluent liar in front of him.

"How did he come here? What brought him here?" asked Lord Landon. "This is about the last place one would have expected to find him."

"Yes, indeed!" said Thane. "I found him in my smoking den. He had got into the house on the real or pretended excuse of being an assistant to the sculptor whom I have engaged to carve Lady Sybil's bust. I entered quietly, and found him trying the lock of a safe I keep in the room."

The ladies started, and instinctively their hands went to their jewels.

"Oh, dear! I left my casket open on my dressing-table!" exclaimed one of them, in terrified accents; and she scuttled from the room.

"I pretended that I had not noticed him," Thane went on, "and that I did not recognize him; and after a time I persuaded him to come on to the drawing-room. The rest"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you know."

A long-drawn sigh went up from the hot, excited crowd. It was a delicious sensation, something to talk about for the next twelve months!

Lady Sybil glided to Thane and put her hand on his arm.

"Are you hurt, Norman, dear?" she murmured, sweetly.

"No, no," he said, putting his arm round her—"no, I am not hurt. But the struggle was sharp while it lasted, and the fellow is strong, confound him!"

Lord Landon turned to Lord Norman.

"What have you to say?" he asked.

The spectators held their breath as they waited for the answer. They expected a fluent explanation, the usual denial of the expert and hardened criminal.

Lord Norman looked his questioner full in the face, and the direct gaze of the splendid eyes made Lord Landon, somehow, feel uncomfortable.

"Well?" he said, impatiently.

Lord Norman opened his lips, then closed them again; for as he looked round, he saw that no denial would be believed. Every face had "Guilty" written on it.

"Nothing, my lord," he said.

At the sound of the deep, musical voice Lord Landon, and many others in the group, started.

"Lord Lechmere charges you with theft and attempted murder—"

"He is a notorious bushranger," broke in Thane. "There is a price on his head out in Australia. I am not the only one he has robbed, and I have no doubt that he has half a dozen murders to answer for."

"You hear?" said Lord Landon, gravely. "What have you to say?"

"Nothing, at present," was the quiet reply, as the calm eyes met Lord Landon's unflinchingly.

"He knows it is of no use," said Thane. "For Heaven's sake, hand him over to the police!" As he spoke he turned to the group of excited servants. "Send for some constables—all of them!" he said.

Lord Landon held up his hand.

"Order my carriage," he said, quietly. "I will take him to the lock-up. Do you intend to offer any resistance, my man?"

"No," said Lord Norman. "That man is a liar—"

"Oh, of course!" broke in Thane, with a sneer. "He will swear that there is a mistake, and that he is not the man—they all do."

Lord Norman looked at him steadily, then turned to Lord Landon.

"I will offer no resistance," he said. "The man you should watch and hold fast stands there;" and he nodded toward Thane.

"Fetch me a revolver, if you have one, Lechmere," said Lord Landon, of course addressing Thane.

Thane beckoned to Robins.

"You will find one in my dressing-table drawer. Quick!" he said.

Robins, trembling with excitement, started off, and presently returned with the revolver and handed it to Lord Landon.

"Let him go," he said.

Thane shrunk back.

"Be careful, for God's sake!" he said. "The fellow is desperate and dangerous; he sticks at nothing."

Landon regarded Thane with something like contempt.

"I am not afraid," he said. Then he added, to Lord Nor-

man: "If you attempt to escape, of course I shall shoot you."

"I shall not attempt to escape," said Lord Norman.

"Then let him go," said Lord Landon to the other gentlemen who held Lord Norman's arms.

They released him, reluctantly enough, and their prisoner stretched himself and breathed a deep sigh; but, to the relief of the ladies, he did not spring at them like an escaped lion from a menagerie.

Lord Landon signed to him to walk on ahead, and Lord Norman obeyed. The crowd of ladies and gentleman followed them into the hall. All were talking now, and a babel of confusion reigned supreme. Lord Norman looked round the hall. He remembered every picture, every man in armor, every flag; and that he should be able so to remember filled him, even in that moment, with a deep sense of joy.

"The carriage, my lord," said a footman.

"Walk on," said Lord Landon, with the revolver in his hand.

As the prisoner stepped forward toward the door, the tall, bent figure of an old man clad in a long dressing-gown was seen at the head of the broad stairs. A murmur rose, "The earl! the earl!"

Lord Norman heard it, and stopping, looked up. The earl looked down at the crowded scene, then saw Lord Norman's upturned face. He started, threw up his arms, and called out. Every eye turned to the gaunt figure, the wan, haggard face. He moved his thin hands above his head, gesticulated wildly, excitedly, and opening his lips, poured out a string of incoherent sentences, his eyes flashing in their dark hollows, like balls of fire.

Lord Norman looked up at him, and their eyes met, a strange, wistful expression burning in the old man's.

"My uncle!" murmured Lord Norman; but probably no one in the excited crowd caught the words.

Thane looked from one to the other.

"Take him away!" he said, hoarsely. "Take him away at once!"

Lord Landon put his hand on Norman Lechmere's shoulder, and gently forced him through the hall and into the carriage, and followed him. But as it drove away, Lord Norman could still see the gaunt figure on the top of the stairs, waving its hands and gesticulating with piteous helplessness.

"I have your promise that you will not attempt to escape?" said Lord Landon.

"You have," said Lord Norman. Then he smiled. "My lord, I am a young man, and a strong one; I could grip you before you could raise that revolver."

"I know it," said Lord Landon, coolly. "I also know when a man—though he may be a scoundrel—is telling the truth."

He uncocked the revolver and laid it down beside him.

"Thank you," said Lord Norman; and he leaned back and folded his arms.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE carriage containing Lord Landon and his prisoner drove down to the village, and the footman roused the constable. He was an old man who had spent the greater portion of his life at Chesney, and had never had a "big" case in his hands. His experience scarcely extending beyond an occasional petty larceny by a tramp, or a "drunk and disorderly," it need scarcely be said that he was considerably flustered when Lord Landon informed him of the charge against Lord Norman.

"This yere young man!" said the constable, eying Norman Lechmere's grave, handsome face with astonishment and incredulity. "He doesn't look that sort o' man, my lord, do 'ee? Do you give him in charge, my lord?"

Lord Landon paused. He had forgotten this formality.

"No, not I," he said; "but Lord Lechmere does. He knows him and will charge him."

"Oh, if his lordship says he's guilty, it's all right, my lord," said the constable, buttoning his tunic and slipping on his helmet. "Shall I take him straight off to Dexmouth, or put him in the lock-up for to-night?"

Again Lord Landon hesitated, and he glanced at his prisoner, who stood perfectly quiet and patient. It was late, and the drive to Dexmouth would be a long one.

"Better put him in the lock-up," said Landon. He turned to Norman: "You are on your parole, Thane."

"Pardon me," said Norman, with a grave smile; "my parole closes when you and I part company, Lord Landon. I promised not to attempt to escape while in your custody. I think you should be satisfied with that."

Lord Landon nodded.

"Take care of him," he said in an under-tone to the constable. "He is young and strong—"

The constable wagged his head and snorted.

"I'll take care of him, my lord, never fear. The lock-up's strong enough to hold a giant, and I'll put the handcuffs on him for safety."

Somehow or other the suggestion jarred upon Lord Landon.

"No, no," he said. "If the lock-up is secure, you will not need to handcuff him, constable."

"Thank you, my lord," said Norman, in a low voice.

"Come along with me, young man," said the constable, in the same tone and manner with which he was wont to address a tramp charged with hen-stealing.

The three walked to a square stone building not very far from the inn. The door was a thick one, old but still sturdy, studded with iron nails and fastened by a padlocked bar.

The constable unlocked it with some difficulty, and holding up the lantern, signed to Lord Norman to enter. The place struck cold and chill and smelled musty. There was a plank bedstead, a chair, and a bundle of, by no means dry, straw.

"Oh," said Lord Landon, "I think he would be more comfortable at Dexmouth, constable!"

"No, no; this will do, my lord," said Norman Lechmere. "I am tired, and shall sleep very well."

"I'll be bound he will," remarked the constable. "Most of 'em sleep like tops and has to be woke in the morning. There's a comfortable bed and plenty o' straw—good enough, and more, for the likes o' him. Good-night, young man, and don't 'ee make a disturbance, now!"

With something like a paternal nod to his prisoner, the constable locked him in and went off with Lord Landon to take down the charge in due form.

Lord Norman felt his way to the wooden bed, and sinking down on it, held his head with his hands, and "considered the situation," as the French say. Much as he loathed and despised Harold Thane, he was obliged to admit to himself that the scoundrel was as clever and ready as he was unscrupulous. The complete turning of the tables, the change from the accused to the accuser, was a stroke of genius; and it seemed to Lord Norman that only a special interposition of Providence could reveal the truth and save him from penal servitude. But it was not so much of himself or his own danger that he thought as of Madge. That Madge Gordon should be his girl-love, after all, that she should still be free for him to woo and win, filled him, even in that moment, with indescribable joy. He forgot that he was a prisoner, charged with robbery and attempted murder, and that his accuser could bring sufficient circumstantial evidence to convict him;

he forgot the cold and discomfort, and the blood ran warm and tingling through his veins. Madge would not think him guilty; Madge would recognize him and believe in him when he had told her his story and recalled the past to her.

He paced up and down, thinking of her, filling the darkness with mental pictures of her sweet face, until he lost all count of time. Presently he heard the clock strike one, and was about to stretch himself on the plank bed, when he heard a tapping against the heavily barred door.

"Well?" he asked. "Who is it?"

"Richmond!" came Mr. Gerard's voice.

"Yes," said Lord Norman, with a sudden flush of pleasure.

"I am here, Mr. Gerard."

"What the devil are you doing here?" came the impatient question. "Are you drunk?"

Lord Norman could not suppress a short laugh.

"No," he said; "I am only too plainly sober. Didn't you know that I was here in custody?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Gerard. "An old fool of a constable came into the inn parlor and let out that he'd got 'my man' as a prisoner; but he declined to state on what charge, with all the pomposity of a yokel detective, and I naturally concluded that you'd got drunk up at the big place and kicked up a row."

Lord Norman felt his way to the window and quietly broke one of the small panes of glass.

"I am in custody on a charge of robbery and attempted murder in Australia—and here, too, by the way," he said, and he could almost feel Mr. Gerard start.

"What? Nonsense! Tell the truth, Richmond. You have been up to some foolery up at the Chase?"

"Well, yes, I have," said Lord Norman, with mild bitterness, as he thought of the way in which he had been trapped. "It was the stupidest kind of foolery, I'll admit, but I think it is not unlikely to land me in penal servitude."

Mr. Gerard whistled.

"Tell me all about it," he said. "You can speak out. I stood that old idiot a couple of glasses of British brandy, and he is sleeping by the parlor fire like a log. Stop! are you comfortable in there?"

"Anything but comfortable," said Lord Norman. "It is worse than the casual ward of a work-house."

"Then you'd better come out," said Mr. Gerard.

Lord Norman smiled grimly.

"That is easier said than done," he remarked.

"Wait," said Mr. Gerard; and Lord Norman heard his footsteps retreating carefully.

In a very short time, though it seemed hours to Norman, the sculptor was at the window again.

"Put your hand through the hole in the window," he said.

Lord Norman did so, and felt it come in contact with a chisel.

"Now the mallet," said Mr. Gerard. "Muffle it with your handkerchief—not that you're likely to wake any one, for the whole place is simply dead asleep. Hold on a minute; I have brought you my flask. Don't talk, but loosen the bottom of the bars inside while I take out these outside."

Lord Norman, feeling that he had cause to thank the fate that had made him a sculptor's mason, deftly plied the mallet and chisel, and in the course of half an hour had cut or pried the bars from their sockets. He had to wait for Mr. Gerard, who had worked with more caution, and therefore less noise; but presently the way was clear, and pulling himself up to the ledge, he slid through the window, and stood, a free man, beside the sculptor.

Mr. Gerard eyed him grimly in the darkness.

"What do they give for assisting a prisoner to escape?" he asked.

Lord Norman found and pressed his hand.

"Go back to the inn and take the tools, sir," he said.

"No one will suspect."

Mr. Gerard cut him short with a grunt.

"Oh, it's not my way to do things by halves," he said.

"Let us get out of this. But you'll be sure to be retaken in the morning. The good old times when a man could play Jack Sheppard have gone forever. They will take you again before breakfast, Richmond."

Lord Norman set his teeth.

"They may take me as soon as they like after—after I have been to London and seen—a certain person," he said. "Let me think a moment. Yes, I got off that way long ago; I'll try it again." He looked round thoughtfully. "Yes, that's the road. Come along—if you're sure you won't go back to the inn."

Mr. Gerard shook his head.

"Not -I," he said, calmly. "In for a penny, in for a pound. Besides, I'm interested and curious. It isn't often a man gets a chance of an adventure nowadays. What do you say they charge you with?"

"Robbery and attempted murder," said Lord Norman. "You are not afraid?" and he smiled grimly.

"No," said Mr. Gerard. "I don't suppose you will take the trouble to rob or murder me. You seem to know this road? It's not the way we came? But you said you were here before?"

"Yes," said Lord Norman, "I know it very well. I know the place we have left—the Chase and the village, I mean. I have just remembered it. It—all of it—belongs to my uncle, and I am his heir."

The sculptor stopped dead short and stared at him. Then he whistled softly.

"I see," he murmured.

"You think I have gone mad, and that is why they have locked me up?" said Lord Norman, quietly.

"Never mind, never mind; don't worry about it," responded Mr. Gerard, soothingly.

"Yes, I see you do. You would not believe me if I told you that my name is not Harry Richmond, but Norman Lechmere, and that I am the nephew and heir of the Earl of Chesney, the poor old man who owns all this?"

"No, I certainly should not," began Mr. Gerard, as he walked on; then he stopped again and caught his companion's hand. "Let me feel your pulse," he said. "Humph! quite normal. *What do you say you are?*"

"I am Viscount Lechmere," replied Lord Norman, as quietly as before. "I do not wonder at your astonishment, and I am not at all offended by your incredulity; I should not have believed it myself if any one had told me—earlier in the evening—but, you see, *I have remembered it since then.* Don't speak! Let me tell you the whole story. We must walk fast and reach Dexmouth before the people are about. If we have any luck, we shall get a boat to take us along the coast. You see, I know the road. I have done this before. Now listen."

He told the whole story, as he had promised, and Mr. Gerard listened in silence, broken only by occasional soft whistles and half-suppressed exclamations of astonishment and indignation, and, even when Lord Norman had finished, he remained silent.

"Do you believe me, or do you consider me a particularly gifted liar?" asked Lord Norman.

Mr. Gerard inclined his head.

"I believe you," he said, quietly, very quietly. "My silence was no indication of incredulity. I was thinking."

"Well?" asked Lord Norman, with suppressed impatience.

"That, though I believe it, you will find it difficult to persuade a jury of twelve men to accept it as truth. I have suspected all along that you were a kind of 'prince in disguise.' I said something of the kind to—to Madge Gordon, I remember."

Lord Norman drew a long breath.

"*She* will believe me," he said in a low voice.

"I dare say," assented Mr. Gerard, significantly; "but she will not try the case, unfortunately. My dear fellow, don't you see that this man—this Harold Thane—your double, has all the pull? He is in possession. He has been recognized and acknowledged as the real Simon Pure by everybody. He has the articles of evidence. The handkerchief, the lock of hair—"

"Which he stole!"

"So *you* say!" retorted Mr. Gerard. "But he will swear that they have been his all along; and who is to disprove it, only your assertion; and who are you? *Why, you yourself didn't know it until a few hours ago.* What jury will believe that, if you are the right man, you would have been such an idiot as to live the life of a common workman, and allow another, an impostor, to reign in your stead?"

"But—but—my memory. I had lost it. That scoundrel had deprived me of it by his cowardly blows."

"Yes, so you say, and so I believe. But the jury—the beautiful, pig-headed jury, that never can be got to recognize the truth of anything outside the ordinary and commonplace—what about them?"

"There—there is Madge—Miss Gordon!" Lord Norman said in a low voice.

"We-ll? Did she recognize you? Stop! Ah, I remember—I remember! Yes, if she did not actually recognize you, she was much moved by the likeness. I remember her embarrassment. But, my dear fellow, that is only one witness against—how many? Your uncle, all his friends, the people on the estate, they must all have acknowledged this Harold Thane as the right man."

Lord Norman's face went white, and he set his teeth hard.

"'Great is truth, and it shall prevail,' " he said, sternly.

"Good old copy-book heading," remarked Mr. Gerard. "Bah! my dear sir, we've altered that long ago into 'Great is falsehood, and it shall prevail.' It's easier to prove a lie, when you've got all the evidence on your side, than it is to

prove the truth when you've got none. No; go before a jury and—” He stopped.

“They will convict me of all the crimes committed by Harold Thane,” said Lord Norman, bitterly.

“They will. They will say that you *are* Harold Thane. *Ergo*, you must not go before a jury. No, Lord Lechmere, there must be ‘another way,’ as the cookery books say. But what—but what?” and he strode on with his rugged face drawn into a deep and thoughtful frown. Presently he pulled up short. “You must go on alone,” he said, “and I must go back to the inn, and look as innocent of all complicity in your escape as I can. If I leave in this sudden fashion they will at once jump to the conclusion that I had gone off with you, and track us down to my studio. I’ll go back and keep a sharp eye upon Lord Norman—I beg your pardon! I mean Harold Thane—and by some means or other let you know what course he is taking. I have an idea he won’t be in a hurry to pursue you, and that he will wait on your action.”

Lord Norman was forced to admit the wisdom of the proposal; but he found it hard to part with his friend in this the hour of his need.

“I can never be grateful enough for your faith in me, Mr. Gerard,” he said as he clasped the sculptor’s hand.

Mr. Gerard shrugged his shoulders.

“You see, it was easy to believe your story, for I had made up my mind that you were something more than what you appeared to be. Go and see Miss Gordon, and I will send all news to you through her. Good-bye, and God-speed! Keep your heart up; but don’t forget that you’ve a clever rogue to fight against.”

Lord Norman went on his way alone, following the road on which he had tramped when as a boy he had fled from Chesney Chase. He could remember each point distinctly, and could see as distinctly the boy with whom he had exchanged clothes. It was wonderful how completely the shock of meeting Harold Thane had restored the long-lost memory.

It was not yet dawn when he reached Dexamouth, and there luck stood by him, for he found a bark laden with stone just on the point of leaving the quay. Explaining that he was too short of money to pay the railway fare, and offering to lend a hand in working the vessel, Lord Norman asked for a passage; and the skipper, after eying the stalwart figure approvingly, readily acceded it.

In less than half an hour the ship was gliding past the wooded cliffs of Chesney Chase—the cliffs and woods to which

Lord Norman was heir. And as he watched them fade away in the distance the blood burned in his veins and his eyes flashed. A thief and impostor bore his name and sat in his place, while he, Lord Norman, was an outcast and fugitive from justice! Would the truth prevail, or was Mr. Gerard right, and all hope of his ever regaining his own lost forever?

CHAPTER XXXII.

THREE days later Madge was sitting beside the fire, her work in her lap, Mr. Gordon dozing in his chair. Although her work was in her hands, she had been sitting idle for fully an hour, her eyes watching the fire dreamily, her thoughts wandering. She was thinking—though she tried hard not to do so—of Harry Richmond. No one but herself could have told how she had missed the ring of the mallet and chisel during the last few days. It seemed to her as if he had been absent for years, and as if something had gone out of her life. Twenty times a day she caught herself stopping in whatever she was doing—stopping and looking before her vacantly as if she were trying to remember something; then, with a start and a blush, she would discover that she was thinking of Harry Richmond, and hurry on with her work again.

Mr. Silas Fletcher also was absent, but she did not think of him, or if she did, it was with a shudder. It was strange and unaccountable to her, but since she had known Harry Richmond, her dislike for and distrust of Silas Fletcher had increased. His absence was a relief to her, the thought of his return a dread and fear.

This evening, as she sat looking at the fire, she was all unconsciously comparing the two men, and she started almost guiltily when she heard a quick, firm step on the stairs and there came a knock at the door. She knew the step in a moment, and rose with her hand pressed to her heaving bosom; and it was quite a minute before she could pronounce the words:

“Come in!”

The door opened and Lord Norman entered. As she looked at him, she started, for her eyes, quickened by love, noticed the subtle change in his handsome face. The expression of vague doubt and sadness had gone, and in its place was an alert, eager look which seemed to make his eyes brighter and his whole face more youthful and hopeful.

“Mr. Richmond!” she faltered, trying to control her voice

and force it into one of merely conventional welcome; but it trembled for all her efforts, and a warm flush stole over her face, a shy and gentle expression into her lovely eyes.

He came forward and took her hand and held it, gazing into her face with a rapt, questioning look, as if he were dwelling upon it with an intense desire to impress every feature on his mind.

"You have got back, then?" she said. "Is the work finished? Surely not!"

"No," he said; "it is not finished. I do not know that it has begun. I left Mr. Gerard there."

"At Chesney Chase?" she said, mechanically.

"Yes," he repeated, slowly; "at Chesney Chase—or at the inn, rather. You know the place, Miss Gordon?"

"Yes," she assented in a low voice. "Did you enjoy the change?"

"No," he said, quietly.

She looked up at him questioningly. For all the change in his eyes, the newly acquired brightness and alertness, she noticed now that he looked tired and rather pale.

"Have you been ill?" she asked, anxiously.

"No, not ill; but—in trouble."

He smiled gravely.

"In trouble! Oh, tell me!" sprung to her lips; then, with a quick blush, she added: "I—I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be curious."

"I will tell you everything presently, Miss Gordon," he said. "But I have something to tell you, something to ask you, before I recount my adventures. And yet"—he paused. "Yes; I must tell you this before all else. Miss Gordon, I am a fugitive!"

Madge started, and instinctively her hand went out to him. He took it, but relinquished it with an effort.

"Not yet," he murmured; "I must not yet—not until you know all. Miss Gordon, I have been arrested on a charge of robbery and attempted murder!"

The moment he had uttered the words he reproached himself for his abruptness; for Madge's face went white, and a low cry of horror escaped her lips; but he knew that she did not shrink from him, that the eyes expressed horror of the charge, not of him.

He took her hand and led her gently to her seat, and stood beside her, looking down at her with love gleaming in his dark eyes.

"I could not help having told you so suddenly."

he said in a low voice. "Indeed, I tried to break it to you, but the words left my lips—"

"Tell me, tell me all—everything!" she said, faintly.

"You do not ask me if it is true," he said in a low voice, his eyes fixed on hers.

She looked up at him almost indignantly, then a faint smile broke upon the anxious face.

"I *know* it is not true," she said, simply. "Robbery! murder! *You!*"

She laughed softly.

"Why should it not be true?" he asked. "You—you know so little of me. I am almost a stranger."

She shook her head.

"It is not true," she said. "I know it."

He had hard work to prevent himself taking her to his breast.

"If—if some one had told you that I was a thief and"—she shuddered—"a murderess, would you believe him?" she asked.

"No," he said, shortly, his breath coming fast.

"And yet you know as little of me as I of you, Mr. Richmond," reproachfully.

"I should not believe him, because"—his voice broke for the moment, then the fateful words came forth with intense passion, the passion which had been burning in his heart for years, the passion which had slumbered for a time, only to awaken with tenfold force and vigor—"because I love you!"

She started, and strove for a moment to take her hand from his, which had seized upon it hungrily. The crimson dyed her face and neck, and her eyes fell; then she raised them and let them rest upon his glowing ones.

"You—love me?" she breathed.

"Yes, yes!" he said. "I love you. You know it. Dearest, I have loved you since"—he stopped himself, and only just in time—"since I saw you first. You have never been out of my mind since that hour. You are all the world to me; you *are* the world, life itself. Madge, dear, dear Madge, will you tell me my fate? Will you give me your love in return, or send me away forever?"

She was silent; she could not speak; a wild, tempestuous joy was throbbing through her heart, and causing her to tremble like a leaf shaken by the autumn wind. He loved her. There was no need to ask herself whether she loved him; her heart cried aloud, every fiber in her body throbbed with responsive passion.

"Tell me, Madge," he whispered. "I ought not to have told you, to have come to you, while this cloud was hanging over me; but"—he drew a long breath—"I could not keep away from you, and yet I tried hard. Something drew me to you, even against my will. Madge, dearest, can you love me, notwithstanding this charge against me, notwithstanding that I am fleeing from justice—no, not *justice*, but *injustice*? Speak frankly, dearest! See, I will not touch you"—he relinquished her hand slowly—"I will not attempt to influence you, persuade you. You shall think it over—consider; only remember that I am as innocent as you deem me, and that—that I love you with my whole heart, with all my soul!"

He would have risen and drawn away from her, would have left her, if he had found strength to do so, but her trembling hand fell upon his arm, and sliding down to his hand, closed over it.

His arm was about her in an instant, and he strained her to his breast, murmuring her dear name in passionate accents, and kissing the soft, black hair, a lock of which had lain upon his breast until Harold Thane had stolen it.

For some minutes—Love lost count of Time—they were silent; then she raised her head, and shyly putting his hand to her cheek, whispered:

"It seems like a dream. Are you really here beside me, and—and—"

He drew her to him again and kissed her to assure her of his reality; then she started suddenly, and her eyes grew anxious.

"But—but, Harry"—the name faltered timidly on her lips—"you are in danger! You were to tell me. Have you forgotten?"

"Yes," he said with a smile that lighted up his handsome face; "I had forgotten everything excepting that I loved you, and that you loved me a little in return, dearest."

"A little!" she murmured with sweet reproach. "But I have not forgotten. What does it all mean? Who has accused you of these dreadful things?" She smiled into his eyes. "It is absurd! You guilty of— Perhaps"—and she laughed softly with loving banter—"you committed them years ago, and forgot them when you lost your memory."

He started slightly.

"Madge, my memory has come back," he said, quietly.

She was startled by his tone.

"Come back! Oh, when?" she said, joyfully, her hands on his shoulders.

"Some nights ago," he said, gravely. "Yes, it has come back; the mists have cleared away, dearest."

"Quite away?" she asked. "Can you remember things that happened years ago? How strange it must seem!" and she gazed at him thoughtfully, trying to imagine his feelings.

"Yes; I can go back for years," he said. "Shall I tell you one thing that I remember, Madge?"

"Do," she murmured. "Tell me everything up to—up to the time we met and—you loved me," she added, her voice almost dying away.

"That would be going a very long way back," he said, still in the grave, subdued voice. "Listen, dearest. Here is one scene I can recall, one scene that stands out more clearly than all the rest, now that the veil has been uplifted." His hand closed on hers tightly, reassuringly, and his voice sunk very low. "It is a small garden away in the country—a small garden near a large one in which stands a great house. There is a seat in this garden all full of sweet-scented flowers, and on this seat is a young girl. She is a very pretty girl, with the promise of a lovely womanhood in her blue eyes and dark hair. Beautiful eyes they are, as they are fixed on her book—it is 'Robinson Crusoe'—and very wonderful a young lad thinks them when, coming into the garden with his dogs, he sees them for the first time."

Madge did not start, but gradually her eyes grew wider, her face paler.

"The boy came and sat beside her, and he and the girl made friends. Then he got his copy of 'Robinson Crusoe,' and they read together. Presently another boy burst in upon them—a pale, lank-haired boy, who quarreled with the first one. They fell to fighting, and the girl, coming in between them, received a blow intended for the first boy upon her pretty white arm."

Madge's quivering lips opened, and she uttered a faint cry—a sharp cry of amazement.

"Next day the boy came again, and—don't move or speak, dearest—strange to relate, he got her to pledge herself to him, to promise to be his wife. She was to wait until he had 'made his fortune,' and then they were to be married and 'live happy ever afterward.' That same day the boy quarreled with his uncle up at the great house, and ran away. But before he went, he met the girl—his plighted wife—and renewed his vows and said good-bye to her. He climbed the lattice to her window, and then she gave him a lock of her hair—wait, dearest; be calm!—and he gave her his old knife

for a token, and she let him keep her handkerchief. So they parted, pledged to each other, the boy with his heart full of love and trust and hope, with her love and promise before his eyes and mind, like a star, to guide and cheer him; and she—ah, Madge! let me think that the girl loved him a little; that she, too, remembered her plighted word and her promise; for the boy was myself, and the girl was my own dearest, dearest!”

She would have sprung to her feet with a wild cry; but he held her firmly yet gently, and quieted her with tender kisses.

“You—you!” she breathed, trembling in every limb. “Oh, I knew it—I knew it! The moment I saw you my heart leaped and called to you. Oh, Norman! It is Norman—my Norman!”

“Yes, dearest,” he said, gently; “I am Norman Lechmere. I have kept my word. I have never ceased to love you for one moment since we parted in the moonlight under your winnow, and you—”

She fell upon his breast, her lips seeking his blindly.

“Oh, my love! my love!” she moaned. “I knew it! My heart was wiser than I! I was blind, blind! Oh, my love, come back to me at last!”

“Yes,” he said, “at last. And I should have known you but for my loss of memory. But that has come back now—come back before it is too late!”

She started and quivered in his arms, and raised her eyes with wild questioning to his.

“But—but that other man—the man who calls himself Lord Norman?” she panted. “He—he who bears the title—”

“I know,” he said; “I have seen him.”

“And”—she pushed her hair from her forehead distractedly—“Norman, he had the lock of hair, the handkerchief! He knew all about our past, our meeting, and betrothal, and parting! He *showed* me the lock of hair and handkerchief!”

“I know, dearest,” he said again.

“And—and he knew me. No,” she cried, with a sudden change in her voice, “he did not recognize me! I remember, he did not know me; though, if he were Lord Norman, he would have known me in a moment.”

“But I am Lord Norman, and I did not,” he said.

“No, no; but that was accounted for. But he had not lost the very image of you!”

"Oh, God!" she cried, with a kind of desperation. "Who is he?"

"His name is Harold Thane. He is a bushranger, a thief, and a scoundrel! He robbed me out in Australia of your lock of hair and the handkerchief and my diary—"

"Ah!"

She drew a long breath. With the swiftness of a flash of lightning she saw it all. Love is quick, marvelously quick, where the beloved one is concerned.

"Yes," he said, following her mind as one follows the printed page of a book, "having robbed me of every penny I possessed, and of your love tokens—more precious than all else—and my diary, he, leaving me for dead, came to England and passed himself off for me. It is Harold Thane, not Norman Lechmere, who reigns at Chesney Chase."

Her arms tightened round his neck, and she looked into his eyes with all a woman's tender, loving pity and consolation.

"But he will do so no longer, Norman!" she said, her eyes flashing, her lips apart. "You will denounce him—punish him!"

"Yes," he said, gravely. "But we must have patience, dearest. The man is a clever scoundrel, and"—he smiled grimly—"he has forestalled me."

Her eyes questioned him eagerly.

"Yes," he said, between his clinched teeth. "It is he who has denounced me. I thought I had brought him to his knees the other night, when I discovered him at the Chase—think what that discovery meant to me, dearest! The shock was so great that it brought back my memory, as if a miracle had been wrought!—I thought that I had him at my mercy; but the clever rogue turned the tables on me, and denounced me as Harold Thane, the bushranger, and gave me into custody."

"But you are here!" she cried, straining him to her heaving bosom passionately, as if she would protect him against the attack of all the world.

"Yes, dearest; I have escaped for the present, with the help of Mr. Gerard—"

"And now you will denounce the impostor and regain your name and rights!" she cried. "Who can stop you, prevent you?"

"I can!" said a harsh voice behind them.

Madge uttered a faint cry. Norman Lechmere started to his feet and swung round. Just inside the door stood Silas Fletcher. His plain face was white, his lips working spas-

modically, his small, bear-like eyes glowing with a malignant fire.

Instinctively Lord Norman took a step toward him. Silas Fletcher stretched out his hand toward him threateningly, but kept his eyes fixed on Madge's terrified ones.

"Keep off!" he said, huskily. "Keep off, or I'll call the police and give you in custody—Harold Thane!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SILAS FLETCHER was in evening dress. His face was almost as white as his shirt-front, his eyes gleamed as if they reflected yellow and greenish light from his diamond studs; his mouth, never very handsome at the best of times, was distorted by the jealous rage which tortured him. He had come in so quietly that neither Madge nor Lord Norman had heard him, and Madge's faint cry at the sound of his voice was expressive of surprise as well as fear and—well, something like reproach.

For in her great joy and happiness *she had completely forgotten Mr. Silas Fletcher*. Now she stood grasping Lord Norman's arm, in her terror and consternation, and gazing at Silas as if he were a ghost—and a remarkably unpleasant one.

At Silas's threatening words, Norman started, and his bright eyes flashed over Silas's unprepossessing face and form.

"Who is this—man?" he asked Madge; and at the question, not insolently put, but uttered with that unconscious air of superiority which the "gentleman" uses when he is speaking to, or of, his inferiors, Silas's ugly face grew of a brick-dust tint, and he ground his teeth.

"It—it is Mr. Fletcher—Mr. Silas Fletcher," Madge just found strength enough to reply. "He—he is a friend. Oh, Mr. Silas, if you knew—" she began, clasping her hands.

"I know quite enough, thanks!" he broke in, with a sneer. "I've been standing here longer than you think. I was outside. Yes, I'm 'a friend;' and you'd have only spoken the truth if you'd added, 'a good friend.' I should like to know what you'd have done without me."

Madge hung her head and sighed, not only with remorse, but with pity; for, like a good and tender-hearted woman, she remembered, in the midst of her own joy and happiness, that this man loved her, and must needs be miserable.

A man must be very bad to make a woman forget that he has loved her. His love for her will cover a multitude of sins

“What does he say? What does he mean? Silas Fletcher? Silas Fletcher? Why, this is the man—the boy—I thrashed in the garden that day, is it not?”

This added fuel to the fire that raged in Silas Fletcher's breast, and he turned his small eyes malignantly on the handsome face, but only for a moment.

“Yes, I've been a true friend,” he said, still addressing Madge, and with the same bitter sneer, “and this is how you repay me! I might have guessed it. You women are all alike, and you pretended saints are worse than the others. I suppose you have forgotten—forgotten!—the promise you gave me; I suppose you'll say now that you didn't make any promise, that you're not engaged to me!”

“No, no!” faltered Madge, almost inaudibly; “I—I did not promise—I could not! I did try— Oh, forgive me, Norman!” and she hid her face for a moment on his bosom. “He—he had been very kind to us—to grandfather; very, very kind! He is right. I do not know what we should have done if he had not helped us. There was no one else in the world. I—I thought that you had—had forgotten me and thrown me aside—oh, how blind, blind I was!—and he came and helped us. And—and—when he asked me if—if—I could be his wife”—she tried to draw her hand from Norman's, but he held it firmly, though his face was very dark, and his eyes rested ominously on Silas Fletcher's—“I—I told him that I would try to bring myself—”

“And so you would,” interrupted Silas, with an evil laugh; “so you would—trust you!—if—if this gentleman hadn't turned up.”

She raised her head and looked at him, a look which, though it seemed mild enough, made him wince.

“No,” she said in a whisper. “I know now that I could not have done it if my life—if *his*—had depended on it!”

Silas emitted a kind of snarl.

“Yes, you can say so now; now that you've got a second string to your bow, now that you've a lord, and a richer man than myself, as you think.”

Norman put Madge gently from him.

“That will do, Mr. Fletcher,” he said, grimly, and with a catch in his breath. “I have no desire to throw you out of the window, but another word or two of that sort and I shall be compelled to do so. I quite understand you have taken advantage of some small service you have rendered Miss Gordon—or, rather, her grandfather—to extort a half promise from

her. It is the kind of thing such men as you invariably do. I suppose you have induced Miss Gordon to accept a loan."

"I—I thought—he said—it was money advanced on goods father's took," faltered Madge.

"What took?" said Norman. "No matter; I care not for all. Very well, Mr. Fletcher, whatever money you have advanced under false pretences, shall be returned to you with full interest. And now I think that is all that need be said. Good-evening!" and he pointed to the door steadily.

Miss Fletcher's lips quivered.

"Oh, no, it isn't," he said, with a sneer; "there's a bit more yet to be said yet. You and me and Madge—"

"So good enough to speak of her as Miss Gordon," said Norman, his nostrils dilating significantly as he said so.

"We've got to come to an understanding," went on Mr. Elias Fletcher. "If you think you're going to dispose of me in this free-and-easy style, you make a great mistake. I'm not a country yokel; I'm used to dealing with sharper men than you, every day in the week."

"I have no doubt," said Norman. "Be as good as to confine your dealings with them, and leave me alone. In a word, Mr. Fletcher, if you do not leave this room of your own accord, I shall pitch you out of the window into your native gutter."

He took a step forward, and Mr. Elias drew back slightly; but Madge clung to Norman.

"No, no, Norman! Be patient, oh, be patient!"

"You're right, Mad—Miss Gordon," started Elias. "He'll best 'be patient,' as you call it, or it will be the worse for him. I take my oath, if he lays a finger on me, I'll call the police and give him up."

A faint cry of fear escaped Madge's lips, and she clung still more tightly to Norman.

"Hush, dearest!" he said in a low voice; "the fellow can do me no harm. Be calm!"

"Oh, can't I?" started Mr. Elias. "I fancy I can. You seem to forget that you're escaped from custody, that you've been arrested for robbery and attempted murder, *Mr. Harold Thorne!*"

Norman looked at him steadily.

"You are a bad actor, Mr. Elias," he said, calmly. "The tone of your voice shows that he is your uncle. I know that

will thrash you again, and to better purpose, if you are not out of his sight very quickly."

"I know who you are well enough," retorted Silas, coolly.

"I knew you the moment I saw you."

Madge drew a sharp breath.

"Norman, he will be a witness for you! He says he knew you the moment he came into the room here, to-night! Oh, be patient with him! Think how much depends upon his good will! Mr. Fletcher, I—I ask you to forgive me. Indeed—indeed I would have—liked you if I could have done so. But"—she hid her face again—"I have loved him ever since that day in the small garden. Oh, forgive me and have pity on me, I—I love him so dearly!"

It was an unwise form of appeal to such a man as Silas Fletcher. His sallow face grew almost green.

"I'll have as much pity as you like if we come to—a proper arrangement," he said, sullenly. "Why don't you think of me a bit, and have pity on *me*? Haven't I—loved you? don't I love you still? Why should I be left out in the cold? why should I be thrown overboard the moment this man turns up? No! His fate rests in your hands, Madge. You shall decide what becomes of him."

Norman opened his lips to speak, but Madge laid her small, trembling hand on them.

"No, no, Norman. Listen to what he has to say. Go on, Mr. Silas. It rests with me?"

"Yes, it does," he assented, sullenly, his small eyes drooping, his mean figure seeming to become still meaner. "You stick to your promise to me and give him his dismissal, and I'll let him go."

Norman started, but Madge still kept him silent with a soothing whisper and caress. All her woman's wits were strained and on the alert. Love makes the sweetest, gentlest girl a tigress on occasions; the most innocent and guileless as sharp as a lynx and a fox. She was both at this moment.

"I'll do more than that," Silas went on in a low, slow voice. "I'll stand by him. You were right when you said that I was a good witness for him. I knew him at once—not when I met him here, but when I saw him at the Chase the other night."

Madge started.

"At—at the Chase?" she echoed.

Silas nodded.

"Yes." He glanced at Norman gloatingly. "You little thought—you or the other one—that there was some one out-

side the smoking-room door the other night; but there was, and the same one was myself. I saw and heard the whole business."

Madge drew a long breath of relief and satisfaction.

"You saw, heard it all?" she exclaimed.

"You heard me accuse Harold Thane of his crimes, his imposture, and his confession?" said Norman, quietly.

Silas nodded.

"Yes," he said. He dropped into a chair and leaned forward, his small eyes going from one face to the other with cunning watchfulness. "Give her up—" Norman started, and up went his hand, but Madge caught it and held it against her palpitating bosom. "Give her up," repeated Mr. Silas, after wincing, "and I'll go into the witness-box and swear to all I heard and saw. It will settle the whole thing. He's a gone coon; and you step into your own without another bit of trouble! My evidence—not to be shaken, mind you, and quite without a motive—would be quite sufficient; and there's nothing he could bring to refute it. Give her up, and let her stand by her word to me, and—there you are!"

Norman's face, dark with scorn, flashed into a smile more biting in its contempt than a torrent of words.

"Thank you, Mr. Fletcher," he said. "And you consider yourself a sharp man? Why," he laughed, "the meanest scamp out in the street there would be cuter. I am to relinquish Miss Gordon to your tender mercies as the price of your assistance. To-morrow a solicitor shall serve you with a subpoena, and place you in the witness-box without any price, excepting the usual witness's fee, and we will wring the truth out of you. Get out of my sight!"

Silas smiled at him cunningly.

"Don't trouble about the subpoena," he said, showing his teeth. "I shall go into the box, in any case. Refuse my terms, and I go into it to swear that I heard you threaten to charge Lord Norman with being Harold Thane; that I heard you try to levy blackmail upon him; that he pretended to yield only to lure you out into the hall—and where are you now, *Mr. Harold Thane?*"

Madge cried out with a sudden horror and terror at the malignant completeness of Mr. Silas's ingenuity, and even Norman himself stood appalled at the open avowal of such villainy.

"You will do this?" he said, quietly. "You will perjure your soul?"

"I'd perjure my soul. I'd sell it to the Evil One himself,

rather than lose her," Silas groaned out, stretching over the table and pointing to Madge; and in the shameless avowal there was something almost approaching grandeur.

Norman looked at him steadily as one faces a desperate beast who may spring and strike his poisonous fangs into your throat at any moment.

"I would do anything, I tell you, rather than lose her, or let you have her. Why shouldn't I? I love her as well as you do."

Norman felt Madge shudder as she pressed close to him.

"Don't tremble, dearest," he whispered; "there is nothing to fear."

"I give you five minutes to decide," said Silas, hoarsely. "Let her decide, too. It's her business. Your future lies in her hands. She can put you back in your place, make you a viscount, the future Earl of Chesney, or turn you into Harold Thane, the bushranger, and send you into penal servitude for life—penal servitude. It may mean this, for all I know;" and he made a hideous gesture round his neck.

Madge uttered a cry of horror and loathing.

"No, no!" she panted. "I—I have decided! He will give me up! Norman, it—it must be! What can we do—oh, what can we do? Nothing—nothing! You are in his power! I—I can save you, and I alone, and I will—I *must* do it!"

Her white face was turned up to him as she strained him to her throbbing heart; the tears rained down her face; her whole frame quivered with sobs.

The room spun round before Norman's eyes, a wild sea surged in his ears, at the sight of her agony; but Mr. Silas sat unmoved, gloating rather over the scene which proved his power.

Norman found his voice at last.

"Hush, hush, dear!" he said in a low voice. "You don't know what you are saying. Don't let him hear you, see you, like this. Even if my life depended on it, you know that we could not purchase it on such terms. Come, Madge, Madge!" and he drew her round so that she was hidden from Silas Fletcher's devouring eyes.

"Well?" demanded Silas, after an awful pause.

Norman looked over his shoulder as if he had forgotten his presence.

"For God's sake, go at once!" he said almost meekly, imploringly. "I can not hold my hand much longer. If you value your miserable life, get out of my reach while you can!"

Silas set his teeth hard.

"Very well!" he said—hissed. "I've given you your chance, both of you. I'll have the police on your track in half an hour, Thane."

As he turned to open the door, Mr. Gordon stirred and woke. Notwithstanding the awful import of their words, the three had spoken in quite low and even hushed tones, and he had not been disturbed.

At sight of Silas, the old man smiled and sat up.

"How do you do, Mr. Silas?" he quavered, feebly, but with an eager light flickering in his eyes. "You've brought us some news of the book? How—how is it going on? I—I—think I ought to have had proofs before this. I'm afraid you'll think I'm very troublesome; but I'm—I'm anxious. Authors"—he smiled apologetically—"authors always are an impatient, irritable race." He turned his eyes with a pathetic smile on Lord Norman. "It's my great work on botany, Mr.—Mr.— I have forgotten your name, sir."

Silas glanced malignantly at the wan, wasted face.

"D—n your book!" he snarled. "You'll wait a precious long time if you wait till you hear anything of *that*. Why, you old fool, I burned it weeks ago—burned it to ashes, every page of it, the night you gave it to me."

Mr. Gordon looked at him, still with the pathetic smile, for a minute or two; then it waned slowly, and with a cry of unutterable grief he covered his face with his shaking hands.

This was the last straw. Norman put Madge's arms from him, sprung forward, and seized Silas as one catches a bundle of hay or sack of shavings. Silas uttered a yell of terror; then as Madge shut her eyes she heard a dull thud, as of a body falling and striking against the stairs, followed by a profound silence.

But a moment or two afterward there came a groan or two, a dragging step, and then the opening and shutting of the street door.

She turned to Norman and clung to him with one hand, as she knelt beside the heart-broken old man.

"Fly, fly, Norman! Oh, go, go! Oh, my love, my love, if I could only take your place!"

He knelt beside her and took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly, solemnly.

"Good-bye, dearest," he whispered. "All looks very black at present; but don't let us lose heart."

"No!" she said, her eyes fixed on his with a look that sunk into his heart. "No, Norman! God is good, too good and

just to let evil triumph over us. So now good-bye, once more, dearest. Now go!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE following evening Harold Thane sat in his smoking-jen at Chesney Chase; that is to say, he would sit for a few minutes, then, as if something sharp had penetrated the back of the chair, he would start up and pace the room, his handsome face haggard and drawn, his blood-shot eyes fixed on the carpet with a harassed stare.

The guests had gone—it is wonderful how soon such a party melts away from a house when the gayety is smitten silent by some trouble; the great house was silent and gloomy. The whole country was talking of the strange scene which had been enacted in the drawing-room, and discussing the extraordinary charge which "Lord Norman" had brought against the man who bore so remarkable a resemblance to him, and the news of the prisoner's escape had added fuel to the fire of excitement.

The old constable had discovered the flight on visiting the cell with the prisoner's breakfast; and had been so alarmed on his own account, that instead of announcing the escape and procuring skilled assistance, he had gone off in pursuit by himself, hoping to recover the prisoner and keep his intended flight a secret; and it was not until the evening that the constable—"the village idiot," as he was immediately and forever afterward dubbed—made his appearance at the Chase with the tidings of the prisoner's disappearance.

Harold Thane was furious, and in the middle of a storm of invective declared that he would telegraph for a London detective; but, as his passion cooled he began to consider the situation. It was just possible that Lord Norman had realized the strength of Harold Thane's "hand" in the game, and that he had, for a time at any rate, decided to refrain from asserting his claim.

Anyway, Harold Thane felt afraid to pursue him. He wanted time to consider all sides of the position, time to decide whether he would fight to the bitter end, or take refuge in flight.

"If you think you can catch the scoundrel, I'm inclined to give you a chance," he said to the constable, with feigned magnanimity. "You deserve to be kicked out of the force for an old imbecile, and you would be, if this cursed piece of carelessness were to reach head-quarters; but I'll give you

a chance. Go and question that sculptor fellow at the inn—the man's master—and wire down the line. Do anything you like, and let me know the instant you get on his track. And keep your stupid mouth shut to any one else. Get out!"

The constable "interviewed" Mr. Gerard, but, it need scarcely be said, with no result. Mr. Gerard, sitting quietly smoking beside the dim fire, was as difficult to "draw" as a badger, and in a very few minutes succeeded in adding to the constable's mental confusion and helplessness.

"Do I know anything about him?" he wound up, in answer to the wretched old man's piteous inquiry. "Not I; and if I did, I don't know that I should tell you. I'm not going to be dragged into a police case, even to please Lord Lechmere, and you can tell him so. But, no, you need not trouble; I'll tell him myself;" and he scrawled a short note stating that he had employed "Harry Richmond" without a character and in ignorance of his antecedents, and added that, as Lord Lechmere was no doubt too much upset for the present to feel much interest in the bust, he would be glad to learn that Mr. Gerard was summoned to town on urgent business, and would have to postpone Lady Sybil's portrait for an indefinite period. Then he carefully packed his portmanteau and returned to town.

During the three days Lord Norman was making his way to London, Harold Thane, the impostor, saw no one. His state of mind can be more easily imagined than described. Suspense is worse than the certainty of it; and the kind of suspense which he endured in the silence of the den he had made for himself was so intense that at times he felt as if he were going mad. He had not even ventured to see Lady Sybil, who had driven over with her mother in the morning after Harry Richmond's arrest, for he felt as if she could not fail to read the truth in his haggard face and faltering voice.

But though he dared not see her, it was of her he thought most all through the dragging hours of the day and night. Not only would he lose his stolen rank and wealth, but the woman he loved, if the man he had so foully plundered and wronged should succeed in proving his crimes and bringing him to justice.

"If I had only married her," he said to himself a thousand times a day—"if I had only made her mine. I should not have cared what happened then. Richmond"—it was singular how persistently, even in his own mind, he refused Lord Norman his title; he, the impostor, had almost come to believe the name he had stolen his rightful one—"Richmond

might take everything else so long as I had her. With her for my wife—my beautiful empress, my queen of women—I could begin the world afresh. I'd make a fortune for her, I'd—I'd make a place for myself, a place even she'd be proud to share."

Every now and then, as he sat huddled up in the chair or paced the room this evening, he murmured her name with all, and perhaps more of, the passion which most good men are capable of.

He rang the bell, and harshly bid Robins bring in the lamp. But when it came, and after he had mixed himself another glass of brandy and soda—in which the spirit predominated—he turned the lamp low, cursing his burning eyes, and carefully relocked the door. Nearly every hour he fancied that Harry Richmond was outside and just about to knock; and if he chanced to fall asleep, he woke and sprung up from a dream in which he had gone through the whole of the scene which had occurred between him and Lord Norman four nights ago.

After this last soda and brandy his spirits had risen somewhat, and he was beginning to view the prospect a little more cheerfully.

"After all," he muttered, "my word is as good as his, and I have the proofs. I am in possession. I have been recognized, acknowledged. Let him do his worst; I'll beat him. Yes, I'll send him to penal servitude if he interferes with me again; and he knows I can do it, or why does he stay away? Why doesn't he fight it out like a man? Curse him, he's a coward, after all! Yes, I'll face the music!"

He drew himself up as he muttered this, and looked round defiantly. He would go upstairs and dress himself, and go over to Sybil. She must wonder why he had kept away from her; must be growing anxious that the illness which he had given as an excuse for his seclusion was growing serious. He brushed the hair from his forehead, drained the glass, and walked to the door opening on to the hall. But before he could unlock it, he heard a tap at the garden door behind him, and with all his fictitious courage melting like snow under a June sun, he stopped short and gazed apprehensively at the door. He concluded at once that it must be Lord Norman, and he leaped toward the bell to summon help. Then he paused, and going to the door, managed to control his voice sufficiently to ask:

"Who's there?"

"It's I—Silas Fletcher," came the answer.

Harold Thane drew a breath of relief and wiped the sweat from his brow; but it was some moments before he could find sufficient courage to open the door, and then he did so cautiously, peering into the darkness as if he dreaded to see Lord Norman behind Silas Fletcher.

"Is it you, Mr. Fletcher?" he said, with an attempt at carelessness. "Are—are you alone?"

"Quite, my lord," said Silas as he entered.

Harold Thane eyed him at first suspiciously, and then with surprise, for Mr. Silas's usually "plain" face was now "colored" by an ugly bruise over one eye, and a strip of plaster across his nose. Thane noticed also that he walked with a decided limp.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "What have you done to your face?"

Mr. Silas reddened and scowled sideways at his questioner.

"I've had an accident," he said, moodily. "I happened to—to fall down-stairs."

"And you are lame, too?"

"Yes," he snarled. "I—I hurt my leg at the same time. *You* don't look very well either, my lord," he added, scanning the haggard face with its swollen lips and blood-shot eyes.

Thane colored very much as Silas had done.

"I have been rather upset since—since the other night," he said. "I suppose you have heard all the particulars, and that the scoundrel has escaped."

Silas nodded, and without waiting to be requested to do so, sunk into a chair.

Thane noticed the action and the air of covert insolence with which it was done, and eyed the ugly face resentfully.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Fletcher?" he said.

Silas nodded.

"Yes, my lord," he said. "Is that brandy on the table? I should like a little. It's chilly to-night, and I'm not quite the thing. Don't trouble; I'll help myself."

"I was not going to trouble," said Thane, haughtily.

Silas grinned as he poured out some spirit and tossed it off.

"I'll take a cigar, too," he said; and he helped himself to a choice Cabana.

As he lighted it he watched with half-closed eyes Harold Thane's face, and the resemblance to the real Lord Norman struck him and puzzled him.

"Perhaps you will state your business at once," said Thane, with cold displeasure. "I am engaged this evening, and was just going out when you knocked."

"There is no hurry, my lord," said Silas. "I came to give you some information respecting the scoundrel—you said 'scoundrel,' didn't you?—who tried to rob you, and who escaped the other night."

Thane winced.

"You have heard of him?" he said, with an affectation of eagerness. "Have they got him? Where is he?"

"I don't know," said Silas. "You'd like to have him retaken, of course, my lord?"

"Of course," said Thane, with a forced smile. "So would you, if you were in my place, I should say, Mr. Fletcher."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't!" said Silas, coolly. "I should prefer to let him go—as the girl said of the mouse."

Thane started.

"What do you mean?" he said, haughtily.

Mr. Silas laughed openly, without a trace of concealment.

"If I were in your place, I should like Harry Richmond at one end of the world, while I was at the other."

Thane stared at him suspiciously.

"You use strange language, Mr. Fletcher," he began; but Silas cut him short.

Leaning forward, his ugly face thrust into the lamp-light, the tumbler in one hand, the cigar in the other, he looked full into Thane's eyes.

"You think so?" he said, with insolent nonchalance. "Not at all, when you consider that I was outside that door the other night when Harry Richmond—I beg his pardon—*Lord Norman*—was here."

Thane started and fell back, clutching the table.

"You—you were at the door?" he said, huskily.

Mr. Silas nodded and sipped his grog, keeping his small eyes upon the livid, terror-stricken face.

"Yes; you must have forgotten to lock it that evening, Mr. Thane—beg pardon, Lord Norman. Anyhow, I was there, and I saw and heard the whole business. I know the whole truth. I know who you are, and who he is. I saw the whole thing; and, I must say, you cut a devil of a poor figure! But I don't blame you. I should have done the same, if I'd been in your place. He's a hard nut to crack, isn't he?"

Thane had sunk into a chair and hidden his face in his hands. A silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock, followed.

At last the hunted man let his hands drop.

"What are you going to do?" he said, hoarsely.

"That depends," replied Mr. Silas, cheerfully. He had suf-

ferred so much humiliation at Lord Norman's hands in Harding Street the preceding night, that this sensation of having some one at his feet was extremely pleasant. "It depends on you," he said. "I haven't made up my mind yet. Personally, I don't care a fig which of you is Lord Norman Lechmere, and has the earldom and the Chase. I'm quite prepared to tell the truth and give evidence for Lord Norman, or—"

Thane leaned forward breathlessly.

"Or—or hold your tongue?" he said, hoarsely.

Mr. Silas smiled.

"I'll go one better than that," he said, with a leer. "I'll go into the box and swear that I heard him threaten to accuse you of being Harold Thane, and demand blackmail—"

Thane sprung to his feet, his eyes gleaming redly.

"You will do that?" he panted.

Mr. Silas nodded and puffed at the choice cigar slowly.

"I will—for a consideration—as we say in the city."

Thane leaned against the table; the sweat was standing in great beads upon his forehead.

"What—what do you want?" he asked, in a dry voice.

Mr. Silas sipped his grog thoughtfully.

"Five thousand now," he replied, thoughtfully, "and fifty thousand when you come into the title and estates."

Thane started and his face grew black.

"Too much!" he said, with a smothered oath.

Mr. Silas smiled.

"All right," he said; "it doesn't matter. I can go to the other man." Then he thrust his ugly face forward. "You fool!" he exclaimed. "You forget that you are not bargaining for a title, and land, and money, but for your life! Refuse my terms, and you lose all you've got, and get penal servitude or—" He repeated the hideous gesture round his neck which had so horrified Madge in Harding Street.

Thane fought hard to repress a shudder.

"It is a large sum," he said, hoarsely. "If—if I agree, you will stand by me?"

Mr. Silas grinned.

"My word's as good as my bond; better, as the man said. Stand by you? Of course I shall, for my own sake. Don't hesitate—Mr. Harold Thane, or I shall feel tempted to make it a hundred thousand, and"—with a sudden fury which lighted up his mean face, as if a fire were reflected in it—"by Heaven, I would, if I didn't hate the other man! Quick! Yes, or no?"

Harold Thane held out his hand.

"It's a bargain," he said.

The two hands met and the two men exchanged glances. Then Harold Thane drew his hand away sharply. His quick ears had caught the sound of approaching footsteps even through the double doors.

A knock came. Mr. Silas flung his cigar in the grate, and, rising, stood in respectful attitude.

Thane opened the door and Robins entered, followed by the constable.

The latter was red with satisfaction.

"I've got him, my lord!" he said, wiping his face with a glaring pocket-handkerchief, as if he had been running for some distance. "I've got him!"

Thane and Silas exchanged glances.

"The—the prisoner, Harry Richmond?" said Thane.

"Yes, my lord."

"Where—how?" demanded Thane.

"Why, if you'll believe it, my lord, he came up to the inn and inquired for me as bold as brass, and gave himself up."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THAT night, while Harold Thane paced up and down his luxurious bedroom at the Chase, Lord Norman slept soundly in his cell in Dexmouth prison.

From the moment he had walked into the village inn, and quietly remarked to the constable, "I think you have been looking for me," a strange calm had fallen upon him.

He slept with his head upon his arm, the peaceful and unbroken slumber of a child.

It is true, he dreamed, but no vision of Harold Thane came to harass him. It was Madge's face that floated upon the moon-beams which came through the barred window; it was Madge's voice which floated in upon the wings of the chimes. Her love hovered over him like a dove.

The turnkey found him still sleeping when he came with his breakfast, and stood for a moment or so looking down at the faint smile which rested upon the handsome face. It clouded for a minute when Norman sprang to his feet at the man's touch, and he realized where he was; but he thanked him cheerfully for the cup of coffee and the thick slice of bread, and he eat his breakfast with signs of enjoyment which amazed the turnkey.

"You've got to go before the magistrates at twelve," he

said. "They're going to have a special sitting for you. I suppose you mean to give us a lot of trouble?" he added.

"Not in the very least," said Lord Norman, with a smile.

"I am only too anxious to meet my examination and trial."

"Ah! well, it wouldn't matter if you did. You couldn't break through here; this isn't the lock-up at Chesney," said the man, looking round the thick walls with complacent pride.

"Can I have writing materials?" said Lord Norman.

"Yes," was the reply. "You can have most anything till you're committed for trial—by paying for it," he added, significantly.

Lord Norman gave him some money, and having procured some paper, wrote a couple of lines to Madge. The last were in her own words: "God is good," and the sentence, as he wrote it, seemed to fill the cell with the echo of her beloved voice.

At twelve the turnkey came for him, and he was escorted by half a dozen policemen to the court-room which adjoined the prison.

The news of his surrender and rearrest had spread throughout the town and its neighborhood, and the hall was full of a curious and excited crowd. The magistrates' bench was full, Lord Landon being in the chair.

A buzz of interest and expectation rose from the body of the court as the prisoner was brought in, and after staring at the handsome face and stalwart figure, the spectators turned, as if with one accord, to glance at Harold Thane, the supposed Lord Norman, who sat at the end of the bench of magistrates, his face set with a forced smile.

Every one remarked the resemblance between the two men, and few failed to notice that, notwithstanding the forced smile, "Lord Norman's" face was unusually pale, and that his dark eyes were fixed upon the ground, or, if they wandered at all, carefully avoided the prisoner.

Norman looked round him calmly, glanced at Harold Thane's downcast face, and then looked steadily at Lord Landon, with a mixture of gravity and dignified respect which surprised the magistrates.

The inspector at Dexamouth opened the proceedings, and his statement was short and to the point.

The prisoner, who gave the name of Harry Richmond, was charged with attempted robbery at Chesney Chase, and an assault on Lord Lechmere.

He, the inspector, would not proceed with a graver indictment that day, though he had reason to believe that there

would be sufficient evidence to prove that the prisoner was a notorious bushranger, named Harold Thane, who had committed various crimes in Australia—a man for whose arrest a large reward had been offered by the Australian police.

At any rate, the prisoner, be he Harold Thane or not, had, while in the bush with Lord Lechmere, robbed his lordship of a large sum of money and attempted to murder him.

Then he called Lord Lechmere, and amid a profound silence, Harold Thane rose from his seat on the bench.

“Had you not better go into the body of the court, to the solicitors’ table, Lechmere?” Lord Landon said in a low voice.

Thane colored and bit his lip, and with the Testament in his hand, went down to the solicitors’ table. While he was taking the oath, his back turned to the prisoner, whose eyes were fixed on him, there was a slight stir near the door of the court, and two gentlemen entered. Lord Norman looked round, and a flush rose to his face.

One of the new-comers was Mr. Gerard. His companion was a young man with a thin, close-shaven face and sharp, gray eyes, which shot a glance round the court, and then settled upon Thane.

Mr. Gerard and this young man made their way to the table, and, to the surprise of all, the latter rose, bowed to the magistrates, and said in a low but remarkably clear voice:

“I appear for the prisoner, your worships!”

Lord Norman started and looked at Mr. Gerard inquiringly, but Mr. Gerard stared straight before him, as if he did not know him, or as if he was not anxious to claim acquaintance.

“I appear for the prisoner, gentlemen, and I respectfully request that”—he paused a moment—“Lord Lechmere take his place in the witness-box as if he were an ordinary individual.”

Thane’s face went white, and his teeth closed over his lips; but forcing a smile, he said, “Certainly,” and mounted to the witness-box.

“Who is it?” Lord Landon bent down to inquire of the clerk seated just beneath him.

“Don’t you know, my lord?” whispered back the clerk. “It is Mr. Lazarus Levi, the famous counsel.” And he smiled with an air of satisfaction and pride; for it is not often that the world-famous Mr. Levi condescends to appear at a country court.

Lord Landon and his fellow-magistrates exchanged glances and raised their eyebrows, while the inspector looked rather nervously and timidly at the great man.

But Mr. Levi appeared to be in the sweetest of humors.

"Examine your witness, Mr. Inspector," he said, as pleasantly as if he were requesting him to begin a game of dominoes.

"Perhaps Lord Lechmere will make his statement," said the inspector.

Thane faced the bench, his eyes fixed on the breast button of Lord Landon's waistcoat, and told the story he had rehearsed during the whole of the preceding night.

There did not appear to be a flaw in it, and it ran so smoothly as oil. To the inspector it seemed quite clear that the prisoner had made an excellent attempt to get at the safe, and that by his clever subterfuge Lord Lechmere had succeeded in outwitting the criminal and denouncing him.

When he had finished, every eye was turned to the Crown lawyer, who looked so young and "harmless," and who had appeared, during the evidence, absorbed by a study of his finger-nails.

He rose, almost reluctantly, as it seemed.

"The prisoner was extremely violent, was he not, Lord Lechmere?" he asked in quite a bland voice.

"He was," said Thane.

"Why did you not call for assistance?"

"I am not a coward," was the reply.

"Indeed!" commented Mr. Levi, as if the fact stated was extraordinary.

"And it would have been of no use," Thane added. "The door is a double one, and no cry could have been heard."

"I see. And you were convinced that the prisoner's object was robbery—that he intended to get at the safe?"

"Yes," said Thane.

"May I ask what you keep in that safe, Lord Lechmere?" was the softly spoken question.

Thane glanced at the keen face for a moment. As he did so, two ladies entered the court. They were Lady Darnley and Lady Sybil. At sight of Sybil a deep red suffused Thane's face, and his spirits seemed to rise.

"Some jewels, money, and other valuables."

"And you suggest that the prisoner knew this?" inquired Mr. Levi, blandly.

"Any fool would expect to find something worth stealing in a safe," was the reply.

"And you think the prisoner a fool?" was the lastest

“And he struck you; I notice a bruise on the side of your face. Did he do that?”

Thane's eyes shot malignantly.

“Yes.”

“And you have other marks of violence, no doubt?”

“He is a strong man,” said Thane in a low voice.

“Thank you,” came like a flash. “That being so, perhaps you will tell us why he did not succeed in overpowering you and effecting the robbery? There is no bruise on his face. Prisoner, bare your arm!” he broke off in quite a low voice, but with sharp distinctness.

Lord Norman bared both arms. There was not a bruise upon them.

The magistrates looked straight before them. Thane's face darkened and he bit his lips.

“I think,” continued Mr. Levi, “that when you had lured—may I say ‘lured’—the prisoner to the drawing-room, you seized him and charged him with being one Harold Thane, a notorious bushranger, long since ‘wanted’ by the police?”

“I did!” said Thane, swiftly, and with a sudden flash of his eyes. “I charge him with it now! I have evidence—”

“Pardon me,” said Mr. Levi, with child-like sweetness. “The only charge before their worships is an assault and attempted robbery at Chesney Chase. You can prefer any other charges later on. You may step down, Lord Lechmere.”

Thane left the witness-box, and, the spectators making a lane for him, went to Lady Sybil.

“Why did you come, dearest?” he asked in a low voice.

“This is not a fitting place for you.”

“Why have you kept away from me?” she whispered, reproachfully. “Have you been too ill to come to us? We have been terribly anxious, have we not, mamma?” and she pressed her hand.

“Yes,” murmured Lady Delamoore. As she spoke, she looked across at Lord Norman. The light from the skylight was falling full upon his handsome face, and either its resemblance to the man beside her, or some subtle expression in it, smote her with a strange feeling of dread and apprehension.

She went pale, and closing her eyes, turned her head away.

“Let us go, Sybil,” she said, in a tremulous voice; “the place is stifling, and I—I feel faint.”

Lady Sybil looked at her impatiently, but rose, and Thane conducted them from the court. As he was passing out, he paused to hear Lord Landon ask:

“Do you call any witnesses. Mr. Levi?”

"No, my lord," said Mr. Levi, cheerfully.

Lord Landon consulted with his brother-justices for a moment or two.

"We intend committing the prisoner for trial, Mr. Levi," he said. "Have you anything to say?" He looked at Norman as he put the question; but Mr. Levi answered quickly, as if to prevent Lord Norman speaking.

"No, my lord. *Not at present.*"

Lord Landon looked slightly surprised.

"Very well," he said.

The usual formalities were gone through, and Lord Norman was taken back to his cell.

Ten minutes afterward the turnkey unlocked the door and ushered in Mr. Gerard and Mr. Levi.

Norman sprung to his feet and grasped Mr. Gerard's hand with a warmth to which the sculptor endeavored not to respond.

"You've led me a pretty dance," he granted. "No sooner do I get up to London than I'm informed that you've bottled back again?"

"You have seen Madge—Miss Gordon?" said Norman in a low voice.

Mr. Gerard nodded, and granted again.

"Of course, or I shouldn't have known you had given yourself up. She divined that that was what you intended doing when you left her. Oh, yes, she is very well!" he went on, as if Lord Norman had put the question. "Trust a woman to keep her head and her strength when her sweetheart is in danger. But they won't give us many minutes more, and here is a gentleman whose conversation will be more valuable than mine—at least, I hope so. Here, turnkey, let me out!"

He paused at the door, and looked back over his shoulder.

"Don't be anxious about—anybody. I'm going back to London now—I can't do anything here—and I will look after her like—like a brother."

"There goes the truest friend!" breathed Lord Norman to himself, and almost forgetting Mr. Levi's presence.

"And you want a true friend just at this juncture," said the clear, sharp voice.

Lord Norman met the keen eyes which the famous lawyer fixed on him with a steady regard.

"You mean that I am in danger, Mr. Levi?" he said.

Mr. Levi nodded shortly.

strong case, and a black one. But we need not be altogether hopeless—that is, if you will be kind enough to tell me the truth.”

Lord Norman smiled grimly.

“Very few of my clients do,” said Mr. Levi, airily. “They leave me to find it out, which wastes time. Fortunately for them, I always find it out.” He took out a cigarette-case. “You don’t mind my smoking, do you? I can always think clearer with the divine nicotine. Thanks.”

He lighted the cigarette, and of course the turnkey speedily appeared.

“Hi!” he exclaimed; “you mustn’t smoke, you know. It’s against the rules!” he exclaimed, with mingled horror and indignation.

Mr. Levi surveyed him with a bland smile.

“Do you fancy you smell tobacco, warder?” he said, sweetly. “How strange! I think you must be mistaken.”

And overpowered, either by Mr. Levi’s smile or his audacity—he will never know which, though he should live to be a hundred—the turnkey stammered something unintelligible, and withdrew again.

Mr. Levi held out the case to Lord Norman.

“Light up, and tell me the whole story—mind, I mean the *whole* story, not half of it, or three quarters, even; for that is worse than telling me nothing. But first, just answer this question as straightly as it is put: Are you Harold Thane or Lord Lechmere?” And he fixed his keen, piercing eyes on Lord Norman’s face.

“I am Lord Lechmere, Mr. Levi.”

There was a moment’s silence, then the great lawyer folded his hands behind his head and leaned back as comfortably as he could.

“All right, my lord. Now, please, the whole story. Of course Mr. Gerard has told me something of it; but he is a better sculptor than *raconteur*, and I only know the outline.”

Lord Norman related the entire facts as simply and briefly as he could. Now and again his voice faltered when he spoke of his love for Madge, the loss of his memory, and its strange return; and his eyes flashed when he described the scene in which Silas Fletcher had striven to drive his bargain. But he got through it very well, and Mr. Levi nodded with approval when he had finished.

“It is a wonderful story,” he said. “I hope—” He paused.

“Go on,” said Lord Norman.

"I hope we shall get the jury to believe it."

"That is what Mr. Gerard said," said Norman.

Mr. Levi nodded again.

"It is almost too wonderful," he said. "You see—Who's to prove all this? Where are your witnesses?"

Lord Norman looked at him blankly.

"There is Miss Gordon for one," said Mr. Levi, thoughtfully.

Lord Norman colored.

"Need she be called? I—I would do much to spare her the publicity of a court."

"Of course she must be called," said Mr. Levi. "But will they believe her? They will say—I should say it if I were on their side—that she is an accomplice."

Lord Norman sprung up and began to pace the cell.

"Keep cool, my lord," said Mr. Levi. "Take another cigarette. Nothing like tobacco for the nerves. They will say that the real Lord Norman having jilted her, she has, naturally, every excuse for helping the false one to take his place. Do you see?"

Lord Norman's face darkened.

"No one would believe so foul a lie!" he said.

Mr. Levi laughed softly.

"Touching this Mr. Silas Fletcher. Is he a tall, thin man, rather slouchy, with lank hair and a bruised face? Walks with a limp; the bruise and the limp caused by—ahem!—falling down-stairs, probably? Yes? I saw him outside the court this morning. Lord Norman, that man's evidence will finish us unless we can produce something stronger. I am almost sorry he did not break his neck when—he fell down the stairs the other night."

Lord Norman smiled grimly, and sighed.

"They do well to make justice blind;" he said, bitterly.

Mr. Levi rose.

"Yes; but we will try and pull the bandage from her eyes before we've done," he retorted. "Keep up your heart, my lord; we'll give them a fight for it, anyhow;" and with a nod and a smile he called the warder.

"That's a strange fancy, yours, about the tobacco, warder," Lord Norman heard him say, as the door clanged to. "I should see a doctor, if I were you."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"WOMAN," said Voltaire, "is the Great Enigma!" A good man struggles with adversity, but struggle as he may, he is too often overcome; a woman, give her but love to strengthen her, will rise above the direst adversity and difficulties, and, not seldom, overcome them.

Madge ought to have been completely crushed and overwhelmed by the weight and darkness of the clouds that had fallen upon her, but even to her own astonishment she was not; for, though at one moment her heart was wrung with anxious dread on Lord Norman's account, the next she would realize that her lover had come back from death, so to speak, and that he loved her still, and then her woman's heart would thrill and throb with a joy which overmastered her fear and terror.

He had come back to her; he loved her still, had loved her faithfully all through the years that had parted them. Her whole frame quivered when she thought of it, quivered with a passionate love which was almost an agony in itself, so intense, so utterly absorbing was it.

Norman had left her kneeling beside her grandfather, prostrated by Silas Fletcher's avowal of his baseness and treachery, and Madge had thought that the news of the destruction of his beloved book, the labor of so many years, must kill him; but it is always the unexpected that occurs, and Mr. Gordon afforded another proof of the adage that, "Man can not be counted upon to do anything according to rule."

For an hour he sat completely crushed, as it seemed; then suddenly he raised his head from his hands, and drawing a long sigh, looked round the room, his gaze at last resting upon her pale face and anxious eyes with a tender wistfulness, and yet with a look of resolution and strength which startled Madge.

"That man is a scoundrel, Madge!" he said at last, and there was a ring in the voice, which had of late been so weak and quavering, that surprised Madge. "He is a scoundrel! Don't let him come here again!"

"He will never come here again, dear," she murmured, with a shudder.

"Destroyed it! burned it!" he said, with a sharp breath, as if something had stabbed him. "Madge, we must have been blind to trust him as we did!"

"I *was* blind," she sobbed, almost inaudibly. "It was *not* my fault. But there is worse than you know." She longed to tell him all, but dreaded the effect upon him, and resisted the longing. "Never mind, dear, we must bear it. You will try and bear it, will you not? For my sake!" and she clung to him.

He laid his hand upon her head consolingly, soothingly, as if they had suddenly changed places and he had once again become her guardian and protector.

"Yes, Madge," he said, quietly; "it only means that I must begin over again."

"No, dear; no, no. You are not strong enough to begin it all over again."

He patted her shoulder and smiled down at her white face.

"I don't know," he said, almost to himself. "I have been dreaming too much of late. Perhaps I wanted this blow to rouse me. At any rate, it has roused me. Yes, I will begin again, Madge. Fortunately, I have kept my notes."

She uttered a faint but hopeful cry.

"Yes, I have my notes. It will be hard work, but I will do it."

He rose as he spoke and brushed the white hair from his forehead with a hand grown suddenly and strangely firmer, and met Madge's eyes, filled with amazement and thankfulness, with an encouraging smile. "I can guess his object in burning the book, Madge." He winced. "But don't be afraid; I'd rather work till I died than he should have any hold on us. The scoundrel!"

He went to the table and began to get his books and papers, as if he meant to set to work at once to repair the injury Silas Fletcher had done; but Madge gently drew him away and persuaded him to go to bed.

She herself sat up beside the fire all night, going over and over again the scene between Norman and Silas Fletcher, and ever and again murmuring to herself:

"He has come back! He loves me! he loves me!" then shuddering as she realized the danger in which Lord Norman was placed, and the baseness and treachery allied against him. But always the joy predominated. It was "He loves me! he loves me!" through all the watches of the night.

In the morning Mr. Gerard came to her, and, learning the story of the preceding night, he had gone off to secure Mr. Levi and take him down to Dexmouth.

"Can I do nothing—nothing?" Madge moaned. "Is

there nothing I can do but sit here and eat my heart out? Oh, if I could do something!"

"I'm afraid you can only play the woman's usual part—suffer and be patient," he said, holding her hand in his big, strong one.

"And yet *you* may go to him!" she cried, enviously; "you may go, while I must stay here, feeble and helpless!"

"Yes, that's the way," he said, grimly. "Men must work and women must weep."

"No!" she broke out with an energy that startled him; "I will not weep! Tell him that I know—I *know*—all will come right; that I trust in God and fear nothing!"

But notwithstanding this assertion of her courage, the hours dragged along with painful slowness after Mr. Gerard had gone. Then came Lord Norman's short note. To describe its effect upon her would be impossible. The words sung in her heart, as the poet says. She felt as if the house were too small to permit of her breathing; and leaving her grandfather hard at work—and at work, strange to say, with a bright eye and eager face—she went out into the street, with the precious note in her bosom.

She walked round Bedford Square twice, the silence of the night bringing her something of its peace and consolation; then she turned to go home. At the corner of Hart Street she paused. Mr. Gerard's marble-yard was only a stone's-throw from where she stood, and an intense longing to go to it, to stand amidst the blocks of marble which Norman had touched, and on which he had worked, took possession of her.

She walked thither quickly, and opening the small door in the big gates, entered and looked round. She could almost fancy that she heard the ring of the mallet and chisel, and see the stalwart, blouse-clad form of the man she loved; and she went and laid her fingers upon one or two of the huge blocks which his beloved hand must have touched.

Then she turned to go, and as she opened the small door, she saw a woman standing on the pavement just outside.

She shrunk back instinctively, then taking another look, saw that it was the girl whose face she had seen Mr. Gerard modeling; and, moved by an uncontrollable impulse, she said:

"Good-evening."

The woman had been leaning against the gate, her eyes fixed on the pavement, and she started at the sound of Madge's voice, and raised her eyes with a half-frightened expression in them.

"You know me?" said Madge, going through the door—

way, and stopping in front of her. "I have seen you in Mr. Gerard's studio here."

"Yes," said the woman in a low voice.

The two looked at each other, and something in the pale, sorrow-stricken face went straight to Madge's heart.

"Were you hoping to see Mr. Gerard?" she inquired.

The woman shook her head.

"No," she said. "I—I only came out for a walk; and—and I stopped here because"—she looked round vaguely, wearily—"I knew the place."

"I have been for a walk, too," said Madge, gently. "I am glad you did not want Mr. Gerard, because he has gone away. He is in the country."

The woman looked at her with scant interest.

"He does not leave London often," she said, drawing her shawl round her as if she were going.

"No," said Madge; "but he has gone to help a friend who is in great trouble."

"Yes?" said the model, and she moved a step.

Obeying the strange impulse, Madge went on in her low, gentle voice, which, though she did not know it, throbbed with suppressed emotion.

"Yes. Do you remember his workman, Harry Richmond?"

The woman started, and turned her eyes, with a sudden fear in them, on Madge's beautiful, wistful face.

"Harry Richmond. He is in trouble—great trouble. I think you must know him, and remember him. He came into the studio the other day when you were there. "He"—her voice faltered—"he is very tall and handsome."

"I know," said the woman in a constrained voice. "Well?"

Madge drew a long breath.

"He has been accused of a crime, and—and is in prison."

"In prison?" repeated the woman, huskily. "What has he been doing?"

"They charge him with robbery and attempted murder," said Madge, with a catch in her voice.

The woman started.

"It is impossible!" she said below her breath. "He could not do it!"

Madge caught at her hand.

"Oh!" she panted, gratefully—"oh! how good it is to hear you say that! You know him?"

"No," said the woman; "I do not know him. How

should I?" But she looked away from Madge's shining eyes. "Who accuses him?"

Madge was silent for a moment, then she said:

"It is the strangest story. I can not tell you the whole of it. But the man who falsely accuses him calls himself Lord Norman Lechmere." She stopped. Was it wise of her to confide in this unknown woman? she asked herself. But, even as she put the question mentally, she resolved to go on; for something in the pale face invited, almost compelled, her confidence. "He is an impostor. The real Lord Norman is Harry Richmond. They are exactly alike."

The woman shrunk back for an instant; then bent forward, her eyes fixed on Madge's face.

"Exactly alike!" she repeated.

Madge sighed.

"Yes," she said, almost inaudibly, and with bitter self-reproach; "so alike that—that I myself was deceived. But one is a villain, and the other is"—she hesitated for a word for a moment, then said—"a martyr. The villain has robbed the true man of everything—name, title, money—and now he is trying to prove him a thief and—and—"

Her voice broke and she turned her head aside.

The woman stood motionless as one of the blocks of marble in the yard.

"Where—where is this other man?" she asked in a dry, metallic voice.

Madge raised her head.

"At Chesney Chase in Downshire," she said. "He is where Harry Richmond—the real Lord Norman—should be. Oh, I am afraid you would never understand. It is so strange, so terrible!"

"Chesney Chase, Downshire!" repeated the woman dully. "And is he so like Harry Richmond?"

Madge sighed.

"Yes, until one knows them both. But"—she stopped and peered into the woman's face, it had grown white to the lips—"but why do you ask? Why do you look at me like that?" for the woman's eyes were fixed on her with a strange intensity.

Madge caught her breath.

"You know Harry Richmond—Lord Norman—you know him! Ah, I can see it in your face! Oh, tell me, tell me! He is in danger—terrible danger, and—and I love him! Help me!"

She put out her hand and caught the other's wrist imploringly.

The woman stood for a moment as if awe-struck, then she shook Madge's hand off.

"How should I know either of them?" she said, hoarsely. "It is nothing to me—nothing!" and almost covering her face with her shawl, she turned and walked quickly away.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MADGE would have followed the model, but she had hurried swiftly down a side street and was lost to sight, and Madge went home excited by the conviction that, notwithstanding her denial, the woman did indeed know something of Lord Norman.

All night she lay pondering over the girl's strange words and manner, and after breakfast she was going to Mr. Gerard's studio to ask if he knew her address, when the door opened and he came in accompanied by Mr. Levi.

"Committed for trial," he said, in his abrupt way. "Don't be frightened," for Madge's face had gone white and she clasped her hands. "He isn't found guilty yet, and won't be, if this gentleman can prevent it," and he introduced Mr. Levi, who had silently been watching her.

He was evidently very favorably impressed, for his manner and voice when he spoke to her were gentleness itself.

"No, don't be frightened, Miss Gordon," he said, pressing her hand. "We mean to make a hard fight for it, and we want all our wits. I'm very much interested in the case, and I don't mean to leave a stone unturned. That's why I've come to see you this morning. I want you to tell me all you know."

Mr. Gerard grunted.

"He knows all there is to know already," he said.

Mr. Levi smiled.

"Yes; but every one, when he tells a story, leaves something out, and a different part of it. No doubt I shall hear something from Miss Gordon which you and Lord Norman have forgotten."

He sat down and crossed his legs, and smiled at her, like a child waiting to hear a fairy story.

Madge, at first, in faltering accents, then eagerly, gave her account of all that had passed, and was only interrupted by Mr. Gerard, who growled to Mr. Levi:

"Aren't you going to take any notes?"

"No," replied the famous man, with a slight laugh. "I carry my note-book here," and he touched his forehead. "Is that all?" he asked, when Madge paused.

"No—not all," she said, hesitatingly. Then she told them of her meeting with the model on the preceding night.

"I can not help thinking that she must have known Lord Norman," she said, timidly. "You remember, Mr. Gerard, how startled she was when she saw him in the studio, the day he came in with a block of marble?"

"Oh, that's nothing," said Mr. Gerard. "The explanation is simple enough. The girl—don't look offended now—the girl had the good taste to fall in love with him. That's the real and obvious explanation; eh, Levi?"

Mr. Levi had been listening attentively, his eyes fixed on the fire. He raised them at this question, and Madge saw a keen light in them.

"What is this woman's name?" he asked.

"Brown—Robinson?—I forget," said Mr. Gerard, impatiently. "What does it matter?"

"The name may not matter much, but her address does," was Mr. Levi's swift response. "Where does she live?"

Mr. Gerard hunted in his pockets and brought out several scraps of paper.

"Oh, here it is," he said. "No. 16 Lant Street, Borough."

Mr. Levi took up his hat and glanced at his watch.

"Will you put your bonnet on, Miss Gordon?" he said.

"I'll give you four minutes. I want you to come with me to No. 16 Lant Street and identify this woman for me."

"Yes," said Madge, instantly.

"But why? What good can she do?" inquired Mr. Gerard, impatiently. "I tell you the girl is in love with Richmond—dash it! I shall never learn to call him by that confounded title—I mean, Lord Norman. Whom do you suppose you have discovered in her?"

Mr. Levi smiled as he drew on his gloves.

"Only Mary Marshall," he said. "Have you forgotten, or did not Lord Norman tell you, of the girl who appeared in the bush and mistook him for Harold Thane?"

Madge uttered a faint cry of amazement and joy.

"Oh, how clever you are!" she exclaimed, gratefully, and ran from the room.

She was back in less than the allotted four minutes; but short as was the time, Mr. Levi had a hansom cab waiting at the door.

"You see it now, Miss Gordon?" he said as they drove away.

"It seems too wonderful, too good, to be true!" Madge murmured. "If it is Mary Marshall, she will be able to point out which is Lord Norman; she will be— Oh, if the horse would only go faster!"

"He has nearly run over two persons already," said Mr. Levi, with a smile. "Yes, Mary Marshall has come to England in the hope of finding her scamp of a lover; and when she saw Lord Norman in the studio, no doubt once more mistook him for the man who had deserted her; but only for a moment, of course. All our hopes rest on her. I wish you could have seized her and held on to her till I turned up this morning," he added, with a sigh behind a smile.

They reached Lant Street, and Mr. Levi sprung out and rang the rickety bell, and a slip-shod woman with a black eye shuffled down the stairs, screeching at a couple of dirty children who were sliding down the balusters.

Mr. Levi raised his hat as if she were a duchess.

"Can I see Miss—Miss——" He turned to Madge as if he had forgotten the name. "I mean the young person, the artists' model. Mary Marshall is her name, isn't it?"

The woman, with her hand up to her black eye, in a vain attempt to conceal it, shook her head.

"There ain't no Mary Marshall here," she said, "and there ain't no artis' model—not now," she added, staring over Mr. Levi's shoulder at Madge. "And if it's tracts you've brought, we don't want 'em; and if it's hinvitations to a tea-meetin', we don't want to go to 'em. We likes tea at home."

"Quite right, ma'am; so do I," said Mr. Levi, sweetly. "We are not district visitors, and we only want to see this young person on a matter of business."

The young woman sniffed.

"Then you've come too late, if you mean the young woman as used to sit to stone-carvers and hartists. She left last night."

Madge uttered a faint cry, but Mr. Levi still smiled sweetly on.

"That is just what I expected," he said, blandly, at the same time producing, apparently from the palm of his left hand, a bright half sovereign, and slipping it delicately between the woman's exceedingly dirty fingers. "Can you tell me where she has gone?"

"No," said the woman, evidently mollified by the coin, which disappeared as quickly as it had been produced; "no, I can't. She came in last night, paid up her rent to the end

of the week, and went off without a word, 'cepting a civil 'Good-bye.'"

"Just so," said Mr. Levi, cheerfully. "Could you let me see her room?"

"Well"—the woman hesitated—"it ain't usual. I suppose she's been up to something, and you are a detective."

"I am the young lady's long-lost brother," said Mr. Levi, touchingly—"her long-lost brother, and I'm very anxious to find her and restore her to her sorrowing friends and relations."

He produced another half sovereign, which went the way of the first, and the woman led the way up the dirty, rickety stairs.

"Forgive me," murmured Mr. Levi to Madge. "It is quite true, you know. We are all brothers. You hear that in church every Sunday."

The room was an attic, small and gloomy enough, but scrupulously clean.

"Did my sister take a trunk—portmanteau?" he asked, his keen eyes searching the room.

"Trunk—no!" said the woman, with some surprise at and contempt for such a question. "She just did her things up in an apron, as every one does."

"Exactly," said Mr. Levi. As he spoke he stooped and picked up an old newspaper, which was lying on the floor as if it had been dropped and forgotten in the hurry of packing. "Thank you very much, ma'am. It has been a great comfort to me to see where my sister lived. I am sure you must have done all you could for her."

"I've been a mother to her!" the woman broke in, eagerly. "Many's the time I've given her a pinch o' tea or 'arf a loaf o' bread; and if she's going to turn out a grand lady and come into money, I hope as she, or them as belongs to her, will remember a poor widow."

But Mr. Levi evidently considered the two half sovereigns sufficient, for, with a gentle smile, he wished the woman good-day, and got Madge into the cab again.

The tears of disappointment were in her eyes.

"Oh! what shall we do?" she murmured. "We shall never find her. But perhaps it was not Mary Marshall, after all."

Mr. Levi looked up from the newspaper, which he had unfolded and been studying.

"Oh, yes, it was Mary Marshall!" he said, cheerfully. "This is an old Australian paper." He held it out, with

his finger indicating a paragraph. "Here is an advertisement offering the reward for the arrest of Harold Thane!"

Madge uttered a faint cry.

"And do you think you will find her? It seems impossible."

"I think *you* will find her," said Mr. Levi, with a slight emphasis on the "you."

"I?" exclaimed Madge, opening her lovely eyes upon him.

He nodded cheerfully.

"Miss Gordon, you must go down to Chesney, and you must go at once. The change will do Mr. Gordon good, and"—his voice grew soft—"and Chesney will do *you* good; for it is not very far from Dexmouth, where a certain young gentleman lies in jail."

Madge colored, and trembled.

"But Mary Marshall?" she faltered.

"Will go to Chesney also," said Mr. Levi, with bland confidence. "You must play amateur detective, Miss Gordon. It is not the kind of work which commends itself to you; but I've an idea that you won't object to do anything that will help Lord Norman. Am I right?"

Madge turned her eyes upon him.

"Tell me what to do!" she breathed.

"Go to Chesney, watch for Mary Marshall's appearance, and wire to me when you have found her," he said instantly. Then his voice grew grave: "On Mary Marshall's evidence, and hers alone, Lord Norman's safety hangs."

The next day Madge and Mr. Gordon started for Chesney, the old man offering no opposition to the journey. Indeed, when he was told their destination, he brightened up considerably, and at once set to work to gather up his beloved notes and specimens.

Mr. Gerard accompanied them, and having seen them installed in lodgings in a cottage just outside the village, returned, at Madge's earnest entreaty, to town.

"You must not—*must not* waste any more of your precious time on us," she murmured, as he held her hand. "When I think of all your kindness, your goodness, my heart overflows with gratitude;" and her eyes overflowed, too, as she spoke.

The sculptor grunted and turned his head away as his strong hand closed over her small one.

"Kindness? goodness? Nonsense!" he said, gruffly, but rather huskily. "I'm like Levi—interested in 'the case,' that's all. Besides, it's all pure selfishness. I've got my knife in that impostor of a fellow because he sent for me as if

I were a street acrobat, and am just thirsting for my revenge! Do you see?"

But Madge, as she looked up at him, saw more than that in the large, deep eyes, and, with a slight timidity, bent and touched his hand with her soft, warm lips.

To return to Harold Thane. When he left the court-house with Lady Delamoor and Sybil, he saw Silas Fletcher standing at the corner. Silas caught his eye, and motioned to him, and Thane, having put the ladies in the carriage and promised to dine with them, joined Silas.

"Well?" asked Silas, breathlessly.

"Committed for trial," said Thane, in a whisper and with a smile.

Silas's small eyes gleamed with malignant satisfaction.

"Committed for trial!" he breathed. "Curse him! We'll give him seven years before we've done with him—eh, Lord Lechmere?"

Thane nodded, but gloomily, and Silas scanned him with almost fierce scrutiny.

"You look as if you'd been committed yourself, instead of him," he said, half contemptuously. "What's the matter? Why don't you pull yourself together—drink, or do something."

Thane stared at him resentfully.

"You wouldn't look particularly cheerful if you'd just come from the hands of Lazarus Levi," he said between his teeth.

Silas started slightly.

"What! Levi? He's got Levi! How the devil did he manage that?" He was silent a moment, then he laughed savagely. "What's it matter? All the Levis in the world can't save him. My evidence alone will smash him. Keep that in your mind—my lord." He looked toward the prison with a ferocious light in his bear-like eyes. "He'll never leave that prison till he goes out a convict, or my name isn't Silas Fletcher! You needn't be anxious about the result; and for Heaven's sake, get rid of that hang-dog face! You were full of bounce when you got it all your own way. Show some spirit now the fight's commenced."

Thane swore an oath between his teeth.

"I must have lost all grit if I need lecturing by such as you, Mr. Fletcher!" he said, savagely. "You play your part in the game, and let me alone to play mine." But Silas's exhortation bore fruit, and "Lord Lechmere" was never in better form than he was that night, with the woman he loved

seated next man in all her superb loveliness. He had wound himself up with a bottle of champagne before starting for The Grange, and his handsome face was flushed and his eyes sparkling.

Once or twice Lady Sybil had referred to "that dreadful man;" but Thane had laughingly declined to discuss the subject.

"Poor wretch! I'm almost inclined to pity him," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Penal servitude is a terrible thing; and there may be worse than that in store for him. Don't let us talk of him; I do not like your sweet, pure lips to be sullied by his name, or anything connected with the case, dearest;" and his voice dropped to a soft murmur, and his hand closed on her bejeweled one with a passionate caress.

Lady Sybil returned the pressure with her cool, white fingers.

"I do not pity him," she said. "I think he deserves all the punishment he may get; though I think it's very nice of you to be so tender-hearted, and I fancy mamma is quite shocked at my severity. She is inclined to pity him, too, aren't you, mamma?"

Lady Delamoor started slightly, as if she had only been half listening.

"I—I—yes, I think I do pity him a little," she said in a low voice. "We never know what circumstances may have led him into crime."

Harold Thane drank a draught of champagne and sighed, with his dark eyes lowered.

"Very true, Lady Delamoor," he said, gravely; "and one can not help thinking that there may be some one to share his misery—some woman who loves him."

He paused and glanced sideways at Lady Sybil. She shrugged her white shoulders, gleaming like ivory in the candle-light.

"How romantic and sentimental," she said, with a languid laugh. "I always thought that people of that class always deserted each other when they were in trouble."

Thane's teeth closed over his under lip.

"Would you desert a man whom you had loved because he happened to be—in trouble?" he asked in a would-be careless voice.

Lady Delamoor had risen as he spoke, but Lady Sybil paused to answer his question.

"I don't know," she said, holding out her arm to him that he might fasten one of her bracelets. "It all depends."

"Not if you cared for him," he said, looking up at her with a smile that flickered anxiously, and his fingers fumbled at the snap of the bracelet.

"Take care!" she said, screwing up her lips. "You are pinching my arm in the fastening. Thanks; it is all right now. If I cared for him? No, I suppose not; but who would care for a common criminal?"

"Some women might," he said, still smiling, but with a slight huskiness in his voice.

She shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"Don't be long; I want you to sing for me."

"Two minutes only, dearest," he murmured, raising her hand to his lips and kissing it passionately. "I will sing to you all night if you like;" and he echoed her laugh. But the laugh died away as he went back to the table and drained a glass of maraschino.

"A common criminal!" he muttered between his teeth. "My God! if she knew the truth!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

He went into the drawing-room with the thought, "If she only knew the truth!" still beating heavily in his brain, and found Lady Sybil alone.

She was reclining at the end of one of the luxurious couches near the fire, a screen in one white hand, the other hanging in graceful indolence at her side. The light from the shaded candles fell softly on the delicate pureness of her skin, and gave an altogether fictitious warmth to her eyes.

She made an exquisite picture which would have appealed to the senses of any man. It made the heart of the man who loved her throb and ache.

He crossed the room and bent over her and touched her golden hair with his lips—touched it lightly, almost fearfully; for he knew that she did not welcome any caress that disturbed a hair or a ribbon.

"Mamma has a headache, and has gone to lie down for a few minutes," she said. "She seems to have been very much upset by the scene in court to-day. I'm sure I don't know why. One would have thought she would have been glad that the man was caught and going to be punished."

"Don't talk about it," he said.

"Well, go on and sing for me," she retorted, with a slight yawn.

He went to the piano and sung—sung with a passionate intensity and a completeness of expression which would have filled a musician with delight. It was a love song whose rather oversweet words he made sound reasonable and excusable. It touched even Lady Sybil; but only slightly.

"How beautiful you sung that!" she said. "Sing again."

He chose another song, this time a plaintive melody which suited his fine tenor voice, and his mood, to perfection.

"I declare, you almost make me cry!" Lady Sybil said, with a faint laugh.

"Come nearer," he said in a low voice; "come and sit in this chair;" and he pointed to a low divan close to the piano.

She rose languidly and sunk into the seat, and he sung with his eyes dwelling on hers.

She would have been less than woman to have resisted his voice, the passionate appeal of his eyes; and when he put out his hand at the end of the last verse, which died away in lingering softness, she took it and laid it against her cheek.

He was on his knees beside her in an instant, his hands clasping hers.

"You love me, Sybil?" he murmured, with passionate earnestness, entreaty. "You really love me? It is not a passing fancy, but real love which will last, which will endure in spite of all obstacles? Tell me, Sybil!"

"Of course I love you!" she said, resigning herself to his embrace. "You ought to know that. Why should I say so if I did not? And why do you ask me?"

"Why, for the pleasure, the delight of hearing you confess it, dearest," he said. "I like to think, when I am alone, that you love me with all your heart, that, come what might, you would still cleave to me, for better or for worse!"

She laughed softly.

"That's in the marriage service," she said.

"Yes," he whispered; "we shall hear that soon, Sybil. Say it shall be soon! 'For better or for worse!' Do you remember what I asked you just now in the dining-room?"

"What was it?" she said.

He looked at her as if his life depended on her answer.

"I asked you if you were one of those women who would still love a man and cling to him, though he were in trouble—and danger. You would not answer me then. Do so now. Would you cleave to me, Sybil, though I proved unworthy of you—though I were poor and—in danger, let us say?"

She laid her hand on his head and smoothed the hair from his brow.

"Of course I would!" she said in her soft, languorous voice. "I have said so before. You know I would. Oh, I should be quite a heroine, and stand by you, though all the world were against you!"

He drew a long breath, then kissed her on the lips with passionate gratitude.

"I know it!" he murmured. "I never doubted it, my dearest, my queen of women!"

Then, as if the strain had been almost more than he could bear, he rose and looked at his watch.

"I must go, Sybil!" he said, hoarsely. "Remember—'for better or for worse!'"

Instead of ringing for his horse to be brought round—he had ridden over—he left the room and went to the stable for it.

Sybil's words had filled him with a wild happiness and sense of security. He felt as if he could face the world; he felt as the old Harold Thane the bushranger used to feel before luxury and dissipation had enervated him, and he sung to himself as he tossed the groom a coin and sprung into the saddle.

He felt so sure of her that he could afford to defy fate. But there would be no "worse," he told himself. Silas Fletcher's and his own evidence would convict Lord Norman, who would be sent to penal servitude for life, and leave the scene clear forever.

Yes, the devil was fighting for him, and he must win.

A crescent moon was shining between the slowly sailing clouds as he rode down The Grange avenue, and the beauty of the night stole over him insensibly and added to his feeling of security and satisfaction.

He left the avenue, and still humming the refrain of the love song which had moved even Lady Sybil, he turned down the road to the Chase.

Every now and then the moon was obscured, but the horse knew every inch of the road, and his rider let him go his own pace.

Suddenly, in one of these periods of darkness, the horse started and shied, and Thane woke from his delicious reverie and touched the horse with his heel angrily, for it is not pleasant to be suddenly startled out of a pleasant dream.

"What's the matter, you fool?" he said. "What are you frightened at?"

But neither the words nor the sharp kick reassured the horse, and he shied again.

Thane raised his whip and struck it savagely. As he did so,

the moon cleared, and a figure came out from the shadows and stood almost in front of the horse.

It was a woman, but Thane could distinguish nothing more than her sex, for the light was behind her, and the shawl she wore almost concealed her face.

"Look out!" he said, angrily. "Get out of the way, my good woman, or we shall be over you!"

But instead of retreating, she put out her hand, caught the bridle, and dropping her shawl, raised her face to his.

"Harold! Harry!" she exclaimed at the sound of his voice.

Thane swayed in the saddle, then leaned forward and stared at her, his face showing white and startled in the moonlight.

"Harry," she said, tremulously, "don't you know me?"

The question brought his scattered senses back again. He bit his lips and sat bolt upright in the saddle.

"No, I don't!" he said, roughly. "You are making a mistake, my good woman; you take me for some one else."

She sighed bitterly and looked up at him with reproachful eyes.

"Oh, Harry, look at me!" She turned her face to the moonlight. "You know me now—I am Mary."

He looked down at her with a contemptuous sneer on his shaking lips.

"I don't know you," he said; "I know nobody of the name of Mary. I tell you you are making a mistake. Look here; if this is a plant—if you've got a confederate waiting behind the bushes there to come out and help rob me, you are going the wrong way to work. Let go my bridle! Do you hear?" and he raised his whip as if to strike her hand.

She did not move, and he let the whip fall on his knee.

"Oh, Harry, Harry!" she cried, brokenly; "how can you lie to me so? It can not be that you don't know me—that you have forgotten me. Look at me again."

She drew closer, so that her face almost touched his arm.

He looked at her with sullen anger.

"I tell you once more that I don't know you—that I never saw you before!" he said. "I don't know whom you mistake me for, and I don't care! Just let go my horse and allow me to ride on, my good woman."

Her face hardened suddenly; she dropped the bridle, and drawing herself up to her full height, pointed to the road with an injured woman's outraged dignity.

"Go, then!" she said. "Go—at your peril!"

He gathered the reins together and seemed about to fly. Then, as if something held him against his will, he checked

the horse, and looking straight in front of him, said, in a constrained voice:

"Whom do you take me for?"

She looked at him, and her face softened again.

"Oh, Harry! I thought you would not leave me. You know that I know who you are—the Harold Thane who once—once loved me, and swore to love me always—the Harold Thane who—who deserted me."

"You make a mistake," he said, hoarsely. "If you mean Harold Thane the bushranger, he is in Dexamouth jail there," and he jerked his whip behind his shoulder. "The scoundrel is caught at last, and lies there waiting his trial. I should advise you to go to Dexamouth jail if you want to see him. I am Lord Norman Lechmere, my good woman."

She drew nearer to him, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"It is no use, Harry," she said, almost pityingly. "It is only natural that you should lie to me, that you should try and deceive me; but indeed, indeed, it is no use. I know all. I know that it is Lord Lechmere whom I saw in the bush, and whom I mistook for you that is in prison, and that it is you, Harold Thane, *my* Harry, who are here. I learned the whole story last night from the girl Lord Norman loves. It is of no use, Harry! For your own sake, give up trying to bluster, and listen to me."

He bit his lips fiercely, staring straight in front of him, then he laughed an uneasy, braggart laugh.

"You're one too many for me, Mary!" he said. "I'll own up. After all, it was rather too thin my hoping to deceive you. I only did it for a spree half the time. But what the devil brings you here?"

She sighed.

"The devil, and only the devil, ever brought me near you, Harry," she said, sorrowfully. "But this time your good angel—if you have not driven it away forever—has as much to do with it as the devil. I have come to save you."

"To save me?" he echoed.

"Yes," she said in a low voice full of weariness and pain. "I have come to save you for the sake of the love I once bore you, the love which, alas, alas! still burns in my heart for you. Harry, you are in terrible danger. You must fly—fly at once!"

He looked at her with a sneer.

"That's no news," he said. "It isn't the first time I've been in a hot corner. But you've made a mistake this time. I'm all right."

She shook her head.

"No; you think you will succeed in putting Lord Norman away, whose name you have stolen—"

"You don't mince matters," he said between his teeth.

"No, Harry; the time has passed for that. I know what you are, and all you have done, and still there is that in my heart which prompts me to come to you—a woman's love dies hard, some women's never. Thank your God, Harry, that mine is of that kind."

He scowled down at her.

"Speak out!" he said, roughly. "You say you know all?"

"Yes," she said. "She told me enough to show me that you will not succeed in this—this scheme of yours; that you will not escape punishment if you try to carry it through. Listen to me, Harry; I have not one word of reproach for you; I ask you for nothing; I will not even ask you to keep your oath to me. Let it all go; all that is now past and done with between us; but for the love you once bore me, listen to me and let me save you!"

"If you know all, you must know that I'm quite safe, that I'm bound to win," he said, moodily. "All the evidence is on my side."

"No!" she broke in, in a low voice; "not mine!"

He started, as if she had struck him, recoiled even in his saddle, and his face went white with fury.

"Do you mean to say that you would turn traitor, that you would go back on me and sell me!" he ground out between his teeth.

She looked at him with her sorrow-laden eyes.

"Not turn traitor, Harry," she said; "but I must speak the truth. Even the old love I once bore you would not induce me to ruin an innocent man—the man who saved your life, the man whose name and place in the world you have stolen."

He swore an awful oath.

"By God!" he hissed. "Why don't you go to him straight away? It's him you care for, not me, you—you—Judas!"

Her pale face flushed with shame—shame for him, not herself.

"God forgive you, Harry!" she panted. "Should I have followed you across the seas, should I have starved for your sake, tramped all these weary miles for your sake, if my first, my only thought were not for you?"

She covered her face with her hands, and a dry sob shook her.

He looked down at her, gnawing at his finger-nails.

"Don't you see, Harry," she said, after she had mastered her tears, "that sooner or later they will track me and find me; that they will put me in the witness-box, and that, whether I will or not, they will compel me to speak the truth?"

He forced a smile, forced the anger and sullen ferocity out of his face as he got off his horse.

"You're right, Mary," he said, more gently than he had as yet spoken. "You always had the brains. Come into the shadow, and let us talk it over, and see what can be done."

He led the horse into a small plantation beside the road, holding her by the arm.

"That's better," he said. "Now then, old girl, give me a kiss."

She shook her head, though her eyes were raised to his face for a moment wistfully.

"Tell me your plans," he said, affecting not to notice her refusal of his caress. "For, of course, woman-like, you've got plans."

"Yes," she said. "I have thought it all out. Harry, you must fly at once. There's plenty of time before the trial. Leave England, and go to some country—"

They were almost the same words she had spoken to Lord Norman when she mistook him for Thane, and as she spoke them they recalled the scene in the bush, and she wept and broke out with a sob. "Oh, Harry, if you had but taken the advice he gave you—for I know he would have helped you—if you had but turned to honest courses and been true to me." Her voice faltered and failed. "But it is of no use to go back to the past."

"No," he said, impatiently. "Tell me this plan of yours. You advise me to get away?"

"Yes," she said. "Go at once—at once!"

"And leave him—curse him—to win the day and crow over me!" he muttered.

"Leave Lord Norman to recover his own," she said, firmly. "Harry, can you hesitate? Don't, for your own sake! Oh, I beg, I implore you!"

"Hush!" he said, huskily, and glancing to the right and left of him. He stood still gnawing at his finger-nails for a moment or two, his brain hard at work, his dark, shifting eyes

glancing first at her and then at the ground restlessly; then he said:

"You're right. The game's up, I see. I'll make a bolt for it. And—and you; what do you mean to do?"

She shook her head and sighed wearily. "I don't know. It doesn't matter."

"Oh, come, you know!" he said, and he put his arm around her; but as he did so his eyes turned away from her face with a look of hate and loathing. "You and I are in the same boat, Mary. You must go with me!"

A thrill ran through her at the false words—oh, woman's love!—and against her will, she drew closer to him.

"Do—do you mean it, Harry?" she asked.

"Of course I do!" he said. "You must think I'm a regular brute and beast, after the way I've behaved to you—why, I haven't even asked you how you've got on all the time since we've been parted! But never mind; there will be plenty of time to tell me all about it. Yes, we'll skedaddle together, Mary." He kissed her, and she looked up at him through a mist of tears.

"Oh, Harry! Harry!" she murmured. "Will you let me come? Will you, really? I—I love you, Harry! Oh, I can't help it!" And with an instinctive conviction of her own folly, she tried to draw away from him; but he held her.

"Of course you do, and so—so do I love you," he said. "Why, it seems just like old times, when we were courting over there in the old man's station. I suppose your father's dead, Mary?"

She shuddered.

"Yes!" she sobbed. "Don't—don't let us speak of the past. Let us try and forget it, Harry."

"With all my heart," he said. "But about our plans. What's in your head, Mary? Let's have it."

"Leave it all to me, Harry," she said, with a smile. "I mean to make terms with them."

"Terms?" he repeated, with a frown.

"Yes," she said, smiling sadly. "I am going to write out a full account of the—the—"

"Imposture," he said, with a hard laugh. "Don't mince it!"

"And—and give it to them on condition of letting you off."

"I see," he said, after a moment's pause. "That sounds all right; and seeing the trouble they'd have, without your evidence, in proving him to be Lord Norman, I should think

they'd be glad to come to your terms. And when are you going to do it, Mary?"

"At once," she said, eagerly. "You shall go to-morrow—to-morrow morning, and I will write to them and make the bargain. He—Lord Norman—will not refuse me. He—he has a tender heart."

Thane ground his teeth.

"Curse him!" he muttered, savagely.

He took a step or two away from her, his brows working, his lips tightly compressed; then he came back.

"Look here, Mary," he said, "there's no hurry for a day. Get that paper—confession, or whatever you call it—and bring it here to-morrow night at this time. It's quite safe. No one passes this road, and we can go further into the woods. Bring this paper, and we can go over it together, and complete our plans."

"Better start to-morrow, Harry," she pleaded, anxiously, with her hands on her breast.

"No," he said, avoiding her eyes. "You must come here with the paper to-morrow, and we'll settle the whole thing. You—you don't mistrust me—eh, Mary?"

She raised her eyes and looked into his, and he bore the scrutiny for a second or two, then rendered it futile by stooping his head and kissing her.

"Very well," she said. "But go now, dear."

"All right," he responded. "To-morrow, then, at the same time. Good-night."

He left her, untied his horse, and rode away—rode away without even asking her what was to become of her till then, or where she was to spend the night.

His callous indifference ought to have opened her eyes; but love is blind, and she dragged herself wearily along the road to the village, in which she had got a room, her sad heart throbbing once again with hope.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"Go and play the detective; watch for Mary Marshall, and when you have found her, send me word. Remember that Lord Norman's safety depends upon her!" Mr. Levi had said to Madge; and his words rang in her ears, inspiring her with hope, and yet haunting her with a kind of despair.

For it is all very well to say: "Play the detective;" but Madge asked herself: What was she to do? Where was she to go?

It seemed to her that the first place to which she should direct her attention was the Chase; and leaving her grandfather peacefully and contentedly at work in the little parlor of the cottage, she went by the *bridle-path* toward the great house.

Although she wore her veil, the woman of the lodge *gates* knew her, and welcomed her with unbounded delight, and Madge went into the lodge, and sat down and chatted with her.

The woman had nothing to tell that Madge did not already know, and to Madge's question, put as carelessly and casually as she could, whether any strange young woman had passed through the gates yesterday or that day, the lodge-keeper replied with a distinct negative.

"No one's passed excepting visitors, as I know, and the usual village folk, Miss Madge," she said; "and no one could have done so without my knowledge, because the gates are always closed now, by his lordship's orders."

"You mean Lord—Lord Lechmere's," said Madge, with downcast eyes.

"To be sure, miss. It's a long time since we received any orders from the earl, poor man! Yes, I mean his young lordship. Terrible wild he is, and terrible hot-tempered! He's dreadfully upset about this case—this man, Harry Richmond, as tried to rob the safe, and is in *Dexmouth* jail. I suppose you've heard all about it, Miss Madge?"

"Yes," said Madge, struggling with her rising color; "I have heard about it. I suppose every one thinks him guilty?"

"Oh, Lor', yes, of course!" said the woman, cheerfully. "And they do say that he is a regular bad lot, and that he's done all sorts of things out in foreign parts. But now, miss, tell me how you and Mr. Gordon has been, and how the dear old gentleman is. Ah, many and many's the basket of fruit he's sent me—and by your dear, kind hands, miss—when my poor little Willie lay a-dying! To think of your coming down here again, too! La! how pleased everybody will be to see you! Ah, Miss Madge, it's the kind-hearted people as always go: the other sort stop on, bad luck to them!"

While Madge was giving some account of their London life to the woman, she kept her eyes fixed on the gate, and her ears open, expecting, hoping, to see Mary Marshall come up and apply for admission. Suddenly she heard the sound of a horse coming along the road at a gallop. The lodge-keeper heard it, too, and started up with an anxious, alert look in her face.

the hook. "I must have the gate open ready for him, for he don't like waiting half a second; and if I do happen to keep him as long, he's mighty angry."

Madge went to the window and looked out cautiously.

Harold Thane came tearing down the drive from the house, mounted on a magnificent hunter—came so rapidly that he was at the gate before the woman could reach it, quick as she had been.

Madge's heart beat violently as she looked at him. He was much changed since she had seen him last, and, in the light of her knowledge of his true character, his haggard face, with its defiant eyes and closely drawn lips, seemed to tell its own story.

"Curse it!" she heard him exclaim with an oath. "Why didn't you have the gate ready? You've nothing else to do, woman; and by —! you won't have that long if you are not spryer!"

The lodge-keeper came back to the cottage, flushed and nervous.

"He's in one of his black fits to-day," she said, with a sigh. "Ah, Miss Madge, he's very different to his uncle, the earl. With all his proud and haughty ways, the poor old gentleman is a gentleman, and would 'a' died before he'd 'a' swore at a woman, though she was only his gate-keeper."

Madge was turning from the small window to make some response, when she saw Harold Thane pull up suddenly—so suddenly that the great horse was almost thrown on its haunches.

It was Silas Fletcher who had stopped him, and Madge saw him lay his hand on Thane's arm in a familiar, insolently familiar fashion, and noticed that the two men spoke in a confidential whisper.

Her heart sunk. These two men, both clever and both unscrupulous, were in league against her lover; and he, on his side, had only the evidence of one woman to rely on—a woman who might even now be leaving the country!

After a few moments' colloquy, Thane rode on, striking the horse savagely at starting, and Silas limped toward the lodge.

Madge had only time to dart into the adjoining bedroom with a hurried, "Please let me hide; I do not want to see Mr. Fletcher," when Silas entered.

She watched him as he got a light for his cigar, and gentle-hearted though she was, she could not repress a feeling of satisfaction as she saw the dark bruise on his sinister face.

With scant thanks for the light, he left the lodge, and

Madge came out of the bedroom, and waiting until he had got out of sight, started for home, feeling disheartened and discouraged. Several hours had elapsed since her arrival at Chesney, and what had she been able to do? what had she discovered? Nothing!

"Oh, my darling! my love!" she murmured, as she paused by the finger-post and glanced wistfully at the sign, "To Dexamouth," "if I could only take your place!"

On her way through the village she made several calls upon her old friends and pensioners, and with careful caution inquired if any strange woman had been seen in the place, but with no result; and she went down the lane in which stood the cottage where they had got rooms, with a heavy foreboding of failure in her mission.

Then suddenly all her depression and despair were dispelled as by a magician's wand, for as she entered by the open door, she saw Mary Marshall herself lying back in an arm-chair, and the woman of the cottage and Mr. Gordon bending over her!

Little wonder that Madge could not for some moments believe her eyes, and stood standing in the door-way, staring at the wan face of the woman of whom she had been in search.

"Oh, miss," said the landlady, looking round, "I'm so glad you've come!"

"Who—who is this?" Madge asked, though she knew well enough, and she threw her hat aside and knelt beside the chair.

"It's a poor girl I found outside in the lane just there by the stile," said the landlady. "I was going for some water, and there I see her sitting on the lower bar of the stile, with her head resting against the top one. I thought she was asleep and went to wake her; then I see she was in a dead faint, and I ran back to Mr. Gordon, and we carried her between us in here. Poor girl! I'm afeared she's been out all night, by the look of her clothes. See, miss, they're wet with dew."

Madge ran upstairs and brought some brandy in a flask, and got some between the pale, clinched lips; and presently the heavy lids opened, and, with a shuddering reluctance, Mary Marshall came back to life and all its sorrows.

For the first moment or two she looked round vacantly, then her eyes returned to Madge's lovely face, and she recognized it.

With a cry of terror she tried to rise, but Madge gently kept her down, and with a word or two sent her grandfather and the landlady from the room.

For awhile Mary Marshall looked at her sadly and silently; then her lips moved, and Madge heard her murmur:

"It is fate—fate!"

"Don't try to talk," said Madge, soothingly, as she gave her some brandy. "You must rest and sleep before you even think. Why, your clothes are all damp! Come upstairs with me and change them. Lean on me. You are not afraid of me, are you?" she asked in her sweet, womanly voice, as she saw Mary Marshall shrink and hesitate.

"No; not afraid; only—only ashamed!" came the almost inaudible response.

Madge bent and kissed the white, deeply lined forehead.

"Come," she said.

She helped her change her wet, travel-stained clothes for dry and comfortable ones, and then gently compelled her to lie upon the bed and rest while she—Madge—got her some food.

But when she brought the cup of hot tea—woman's stimulant, sedative, companion in joy and consoler in sorrow—Mary Marshall gently put it from her.

"Not yet; not till I have told you all and talked with you," she said, with a singular firmness in her sad voice.

Madge, looking at the steadfast eyes, and listening to the resolute though feeble voice, saw that it was of no use to insist, and put down the cup beside the bed.

"Tell me quickly, then," she said, holding the thin, worn hand. "But you need not tell me all. I know a great deal. I know that you are Mary Marshall, and that—that you can help Harry Richmond. *Help* him—no, *save* him! and you will do it, will you not? You will tell the truth! You know that he is Lord Norman Lechmere, and not—not Harold Thane. Oh, forgive me. It is cruel of me to distress you while you are still weak," she broke off, as Mary Marshall covered her face with her hands.

"There is nothing to forgive," she said, dropping her hands and setting her face resolutely. "I am not weak; I am strong, but I am tired, very tired."

"You shall rest first," Madge said, pitifully. "Try and sleep."

Mary Marshall smiled sadly.

"There can be no rest for me until I have made terms with you," she said in a low voice.

"Terms?" echoed Madge.

"Yes, Miss Gordon; you were right when you said that I knew who Harry Richmond was, and that I could save him."

Madge uttered a faint cry of joy.

"Yes. I know that he is Lord Lechmere, and I will prove it. I will tell the whole story of—of the imposture; but on one condition."

Madge bent forward, her hands clasped.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she murmured. "What is the condition?"

A faint color stole into Mary Marshall's white face, but she kept her eyes steadily upon Madge's.

"That Lord Lechmere—I mean, Harry Richmond—allows Harold Thane"—her voice faltered for an instant—"to leave the country, and undertakes not to pursue him or prosecute him. It is a great deal to ask, I know that. Oh, I know that; but it is the only way to unlock my lips. Refuse my condition, and no power"—she raised her hand impressively—"shall force me to speak, except it be to declare Harry Richmond the impostor, and Harold Thane the injured man."

Madge shuddered.

"You—you could not do it! You could not utter such a cruel lie!" she faltered.

"Can I not?" said Mary Marshall, with a strange smile. "You say that, and yet you think you know what love means"—she paused a moment and sighed—"and yet, yesterday I, too, thought I could not have done it, that I could not have kept silence and let an innocent man suffer. But I have seen *him* since then; the old love has sprung from its ashes, and"—her eyes glowed—"I would go to the gallows to save him!"

"Oh! what shall I do?" Madge cried. "What can I say? It is not for me to consent to such a condition."

Mary Marshall smiled wearily.

"If all rests with you," she said. "You love him; he loves you. Whatever you say, do, will seem right in his eyes. Besides, he—the man you love—is good and merciful. He is not like mine"—her voice was sad, not bitter—"he will not find it hard to forgive. He forgave him before, and will do so again—for the last time. Harold will leave England, and trouble Lord Lechmere no more. He has promised me. Give me your word—I only want that; I can trust you—give me your word that he shall go free—that you will say nothing till he is out of the country—and I will confess everything."

Madge sat silent for a moment or two, her hands clasping

and unclasping; then she rose, reached for the tea-cup, and held it toward Mary.

"I promise for him," she said in a low voice.

Mary Marshall looked at her steadily, the tears coming into the weary eyes slowly, and as slowly trickling down the white face; then she took the cup.

"Let me go down-stairs," she said, as firmly and resolutely as before. "I shall want writing materials. No; I am quite strong," she added, as Madge offered to help her.

But Madge gently insisted, and, with her arm round Mary's waist, the two went down to the parlor.

Mr. Gordon was walking up and down the front garden, reading, and Madge motioned to him to remain there, that they might be alone.

Mary Marshall sat at the table and leaned her head on her hot hand.

"Give me some paper," she said.

Madge placed writing materials before her, and kneeling by her side, put her hand upon Madge's arm.

"Don't—don't say more than is necessary, dear," she said, in a low, compassionate voice.

Mary Marshall's lips quivered, and she began to write; but her hand trembled and shook, for all her womanly courage, and with a sigh she laid the pen down, and said, as she covered her eyes with her hands.

"You must write, please."

Madge took the pen and was drawing the paper toward her, when a voice said:

"Allow me, Miss Gordon."

Both women started to their feet with a cry. Mr. Levi stood in the door-way, beautifully dressed as usual, and, as usual, smiling sweetly and unconcernedly, as if he had just dropped in casually.

"How do you do, Miss Gordon? Miss Mary Marshall, I believe. Pray, don't be alarmed. There is nothing to be frightened about, Miss Marshall."

Mary looked from one to the other as if she half suspected a plot to entrap her, and stood with her hand to her bosom, her breath coming fast and heavily.

"Please do not be alarmed," said Mr. Levi in his softest accents. "My visit is quite an unexpected one. I happened to run down to see Miss Gordon on business, and I find you, too, engaged on business. Now, am I right in supposing that the business is connected with the case we are interested in?"

Neither of the girls spoke.

"Yes? Quite so. Miss Marshall is just about to make a short statement, is she not? I thought so," blandly.

"No!" said Mary Marshall, setting her lips tightly; "not one word, unless—"

"Unless we undertake to give a certain person who shall be nameless plenty of leg bail. I understand. Quite right, Miss Marshall. This statement of yours is valuable, and you are wise to put a price on it, and we are quite ready to pay it. Allow me. Thank you."

He took a sheet of paper and wrote rapidly, and yet without any appearance of hurry, speaking as he wrote:

"This is a dreadfully wrong thing to do—dreadfully; and if it were known"—dipping his pen in the ink—"it would probably send me and Miss Gordon to jail, and very properly. Never mind. How will that do, Miss Marshall?" and with a smile and a bow he handed across the table the sheet he had written:

"On behalf of Lord Lechmere, we undertake not to prosecute Harold Thane, provided he leaves England and makes Mary Marshall his lawful wife.

"(Signed)

LAZARUS LEVI."

"Put your name under mine, Miss Gordon—it's really very, very wrong!—and give the paper to Miss Marshall."

Madge signed her name with trembling fingers and handed the paper to Mary Marshall.

She read it with a deep sigh, then took the pen and slowly drew a line through the last words.

The tears sprung to Madge's eyes.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she murmured, brokenly.

"And now," said Mr. Levi, seating himself, and drawing paper and ink toward him significantly.

In accents that scarcely faltered, though her voice was weak and low, Mary Marshall gave the evidence which proved Lord Norman's identity.

Mr. Levi wrote rapidly, the expression of his face growing more bland and satisfied each moment. When, with a sigh, Mary Marshall stopped, he carefully blotted the paper and handed it to her to sign; and having folded it and put it in his pocket, rose and nodded cheerfully.

"Thank you. Miss Gordon, permit me to congratulate you. Lord Norman is saved; and I am sure, Miss Marshall, that you will appreciate the value of the good work you have this moment accomplished. when I tell you that but for

you"—he shrugged his shoulders significantly. "I only wish I could have an opportunity of congratulating Mr. Thane also, for if ever a man was lucky in the possession of the love of a true and noble woman, he is that man. Now, Miss Gordon, I should like to have a few words with you outside. If Miss Marshall will take my advice, she will go upstairs and rest after this trying business."

Madge took Mary's hand, and after a moment or two of hesitation, she permitted Madge to lead her upstairs.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, how can I thank you? What can I say?" Madge faltered.

Mary looked at her with sad eyes.

"You will be happy now," she said in a low voice.

A smile broke through Madge's tears.

"Yes, and I shall owe that happiness to you. Oh, I trust—I believe—you will be happy too! You deserve it so much, so much! He *must* love you through all the future—love and worship you! He could not help it."

"Do you think so?" said the low, sad voice.

"Yes, yes, yes! And now lie down and rest, dear."

Mary Marshall sunk upon the bed and covered her eyes for a moment; then she said:

"Go; he is waiting for you."

"Yes; but is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing," said Mary. "Yes, kiss me once, if—if you will."

Madge put her arms round her and kissed her.

She found Mr. Levi waiting for her outside. He was talking botany, with a gravity which would have done credit to an Erasmus, to Mr. Gordon, and the old man seemed quite reluctant to let him go.

"You—you interest me very much, Mr.—Mr.—I'm afraid I don't know your name," the old man said. "I think there is a great deal of truth in your petal theory, and I will mention it in my book. Must you go? Perhaps you will look in again and discuss the question more fully?" and, in an audible whisper to Madge, he added: "A wonderfully well-read young man, my dear, wonderfully!"

"Are you ready, Miss Gordon? Come along, then;" and he led her into the house. "I congratulate you on your success. You would make a splendid detective, my dear young lady; and it is really a pity that you are destined to be a peeress of the realm"—Madge blushed charmingly—"for otherwise I could have got you a high place in the *tenak force*."

"Oh, but I didn't find her! She—she found herself." Mr. Levi," Madge said, piteously.

Mr. Levi laughed softly.

"I know that, my dear young lady; I heard it from the landlady. Never mind; I wanted an excuse for sending you down here, and the detective one came in handy. And now, could you find me a trusty messenger to Lord Norman, do you think?"

Madge colored crimson and caught her breath.

"Oh! couldn't—couldn't I?" she stammered, clasping her hands. "You want some one to tell him; but"—her face fell—"but we promised not to tell him, or any one, until *that other* had left the country, Mr. Levi."

"I know," he said, smiling; "but"—he drew a paper from his pocket—"you need not tell Lord Norman anything, except that he is a free man—or a comparatively free man—until the trial. I have been through a certain legal formality which is called 'seeing a judge in chambers,' and have got bail for him. I have had an interview with Lord Landon, the senior magistrate, this morning, and here is the document which will set Lord Norman free until the trial. Now, *who* would you like to take it to him?"

I am afraid Madge was guilty of the school-girl offense of "snatching." Mr. Levi laughed with pleasant enjoyment as she tore the paper from him.

"Very well; off you go, then! Bring him to the Chase. Let me see—allowing for the journey to Dexmouth and back—I've got a fly waiting at the top of the lane—and the inevitable formalities, you won't be able to reach the Chase before half past ten to-night."

"The Chase—so late! Why?" asked Madge.

"Never mind. I'm afraid you'll have to trust to me for a little while longer," he said, with a smile. "Can you do so?"

Madge held out her hand.

"It is easier to trust you than to thank you, Mr. Levi," she said, her lovely voice eloquent with gratitude.

For the first time in his famous career, the celebrated Mr. Levi was embarrassed, and he was extremely glad that there was no one but this charming young lady to witness his momentary confusion. He actually stammered as he said:

"Miss Gordon, notwithstanding his many trials and misfortunes, I—I envy Lord Norman."

CHAPTER XL.

THANE, after parting with Silas Fletcher outside the Chase gates, rode at break-neck pace across the moor which stretched between the Chesney park and The Grange. He was one of those men to whom, in periods of excitement and peril, rapid or violent action of some kind is absolutely necessary. Shut up in his smoking-room or in one of the luxurious apartments of the Chase, he would, he felt, have gone mad. But the tearing rate at which he galloped induced his overstrained mind with a fictitious strength, and braced him up to work out the problem of his fate. And it was a terrible problem. Before him were only two courses: to "face the music," defy Mary and her damning evidence, or seek safety in flight.

If he took the latter course, he must throw up the sponge, bid farewell forever to rank, position, wealth. Well, he could do that, not without a pang, for—with all deference to philosophers—rank and wealth are very good things, and a man who has once possessed them is not likely to yield them without a struggle; but in relinquishing them he must relinquish that which he held as far dearer and more precious, Sybil Delamoore.

It was of Sybil he thought as he rode at break-neck pace across the moor. He loved her with all the passion of which a strong and a daring man is capable; he loved her—well, not better than himself, but next to himself; and if he threw up the sponge, and, yielding to Mary's entreaties and warnings, took to flight, he must lose Sybil forever.

The thought maddened him. He drove his spurs into the horse, and struck it with the heavy hunting-whip every time he thought of the fair, "faultily faultless face" which he had kissed so often, and which, but for this untoward blow of fate, would soon have been his.

For hours he rode over moor and road, thinking deeply, fiercely; but still the problem remained unsolved.

He had eaten nothing since the dinner at The Grange on the preceding night, but he had drunk often, and his brain burned, his veins tingled.

At last, when he was some miles from The Grange, an idea, a hope, sprung into his mind. She loved him. She had said so a hundred, a thousand times. Only last night she had vowed that, come what might, she would love him still, and

cleave to him for "better or worse." She, a young, pure, unsophisticated girl, could not be false.

Suppose—suppose he put her devotion to the test? Suppose he went to her and told her—not all—he shuddered as he thought of the "all"—but just enough of his past history and his present peril, and asked her to fly with him? Surely she, who loved him, could not refuse?

He would do it—yes, he would do it! She would stand the test, he was sure. She would cleave to him, now that the "worst" had come. He would rely on her love and womanly devotion, and place himself in her hands.

The instant this resolution had formed itself in his burning brain, he turned the horse in the direction of The Grange. Spattered with mud and the foam which the horse had thrown from its mouth, he dismounted and asked for Lady Sybil, and was ushered into the *boudoir*.

She was lying on a couch beside the fire, her favorite mirror in her hand, a soft bear-skin rug over her feet.

"Why, Norman," she said, without rising, but putting out her left hand languidly, "I did not expect you this afternoon. Dear me! how hot you are! and how muddy! Why do you ride so hard? Have you been hunting?"

"No," he said, and his voice sounded harsh and dry—"no, the hounds did not meet to-day. I have come over to see you on business, Sybil."

"Business?" she laughed, softly. "What a ridiculous word. It sounds as if you had come for a bill, or—I don't know what. Do sit down, though you'll spoil any chair you sit on, for you are all over mud. You ought to have got brushed, sir."

"There is no time for trifling, Sybil," he said, his fingers closing over her dainty hand in a way that she always disliked. "I am in trouble."

"Trouble?" Her blue eyes opened upon him with lazy, sleepy surprise. "What trouble? The idea of you having any trouble, Norman!"

"The idea may seem strange," he said, standing beside her and devouring her with his dark, restless eyes. "But it is a true one, for all that. I am in trouble, Sybil."

"Let me fetch mamma," she said, stretching out a hand toward the bell. "She is awfully good at trouble of all kinds. Not that she is sympathetic—quite the reverse—but she always is so cold and calm. I take after her, I think."

"I think you do," he said, with a faint touch of bitterness.

your mother; and she could do nothing—nothing. Sybil, do you remember what you said last night?"

"I said so many things," she murmured, hiding a yawn behind her screen.

"You said, with your lips to mine, that, come better or worse, you would love me—cling to me still."

"Yes, so I did."

"And meant it?" he demanded, with feverish swiftmess.

"Of course," she responded, yawning openly.

He bent lower till his lips almost touched her shell-like ear.

"Sybil, I have bad news for you. The worst has come. Wait; don't move. Let me hold your hand; let me touch you and feel your sympathy, your love. I say the worst has come. I am in trouble, in danger."

"Trouble? Danger?" she echoed, her blue eyes wide open, her lips apart.

"Yes, Sybil, strange things have happened. That—that man, Harry Richmond, has—has charged me, or will charge me, with being—being a fraud and impostor. He says, or will say at the trial, that—that I, and not he, was Harold Thane, the escaped bushranger—"

She would have risen, but he put his hot hand upon her shoulder—her white, bare shoulder, for she was unclothed for dinner—and held her in her place.

"He will bring evidence to prove his accusation, and—perhaps he will succeed. If—if so, I—I shall be an outlaw. I shall be no longer Lord Norman, heir to the earldom of Chesney, but—but a criminal flying from justice."

She struggled with his detaining hand, and even now, looking at him, her lips parted, her face pale white and nerve-stricken.

"Do you understand?" he said, earnestly. "Forgive me for telling you this so—so suddenly! I am a weak man; I have tried and broken it gradually; but—but I am weakest and—and upset. And—and, Sybil, my interest, my love, I want your answer to this question: If—if this man should prove the winner—if he should take everything from me—if he should prove me to be—be Harold Thane, would you—will you love me, stand by me still? Remember, you said last night—only last night—that you would be so. 'For better or worse,' you said. Sybil, I love you—tell me now how I love, close on you. For me no life, my heart's blood! I—I would do anything to save you—anything! Yes, never doer itself."

She shook a little, but only a little.

With white face and distended eyes she looked at him fixedly.

"Is—is this true?" dropped from her blanched lips at last.

He glanced at the door, then fell at her knees and clutched at her white satin dress—clutched at it as a drowning man might at the edge of the rocks on which all his hopes of salvation depended.

"Sybil," he answered, huskily, "it is! *I am Harold Thane!* I am not Lord Lechmere; I am an impostor. But I am still the man you loved—the man you promised to marry—the man you—"

She tore her dress from his trembling fingers, rending the delicate, costly satin, and shrunk back from him as if he had been a leper.

"You—you are not Lord Lechmere?" she panted.

"No," he said. "For God's sake, listen to me, Sybil! I am still the man you loved and swore to stand by! I am not changed. What does all the rest matter to you and me, dearest? Oh, my darling, my only love! stand by your word, your vow! Leave England with me! My love shall make you happier than ever woman was yet! My love shall shield you, cover you! For God's sake, do not desert me, Sybil! There is nothing else for me on earth, or in heaven, but your love—" His voice broke.

"You are not Lord Lechmere!" she panted. "You are—what is the name?—Harold Thane! A common criminal! I shall not be the Countess of Chesney! You—you beast!" Her voice shook with the fury of rage and disappointment. "Don't touch me! Dare to lay a finger upon me again, and I—I will—" She stopped and broke into a wild, hysterical laugh. "You come and tell me this! You—you confess yourself to be an impostor, a vile criminal! You tell me this, and ask me to—" She laughed again, and the laugh cut him like the lash of a whip. "You must be mad! Yes, you must be mad! I—Lady Sybil Delamoor—fly with you! You—you—a convict!" The laugh floated through the room again. "Yes, you must be mad! Don't dare to touch me!" for he had stretched out his hands to her in an imploring gesture. "Get out of my sight! Leave the house this moment!" She stamped her dainty foot. "Go at once, or—I will call the police, and give you in charge, you impostor, you thief!"

The words struck him like hail. He rose, his face white, his lips livid, and approached her with murder in his eyes. *Passion has its revulsions.*

"Keep back! keep back!" she cried. "Mamma! mamma!" and her hand went to the bell.

He seized it and held it in a grip of iron, and his eyes met her scornful, furious ones with a stare of revolted love; with hate, fear, contempt; then he forced a laugh—"the laugh the devils laugh in hell."

"Hush! Hush!" he said, hoarsely. "I am only joking; I—was only trying you. My dear Sybil, how foolish you must be! Of course it was only a jest. A sorry one, I'll admit. Only a joke. I—I carried it too far. Forgive me."

"A—jest!" she faltered, white and red by turns.

"Yes," he said, smiling, but with the awful expression still lingering in his eyes. "It was too severe a trial. Of course you could—could not keep your vow. It was too ridiculous!" He laughed again, and his hand closed over hers in a hot, spasmodic grasp. "Don't be frightened. Go and sit down. Just say you forgive me, and I will take myself off. You will forgive me, Sybil?"

She sunk back on the couch and fanned herself with the screen, her color still coming and going.

"Really, Norman, you—you are too bad!" she said, with a flickering laugh. "I—I—thought you were in earnest! What an admirable actor you would make!"

"Shouldn't I?" he said, with a smile. "Almost as good a one as you. There, you are all right now. Give me a kiss to prove you have forgiven my idiotic joke."

She drew a long breath as she held up her face to him, and he bent over her, took her in his arms, and, straining her to him, kissed her on the lips—kissed her so fiercely, so passionately, that she winced and struggled out of his embrace.

"You—you hurt me, Norman," she said, pettishly.

"Do I?" he said, with a strange smile. "Well, I will not hurt you so again. Good-bye."

He left the house and went to the stable.

"Do you want the horse at once, my lord?" inquired the groom. "He seems a bit done up, and a rest wouldn't do him no harm."

Thane looked at the man vacantly, as if he scarcely understood him; then he said, absently:

"Does he? Very well; I'll come for him in—in an hour or two."

He walked out of the stable-yard and stood at the entrance to the avenue, looking about him like a man in a dream, or dazed by some sudden shock; then he went slowly down the avenue and into the road.

There was a moon, but the clouds were thick, and the light was vague and uncertain.

He walked mechanically through the semi-darkness until he had gone some miles. The striking of a stable clock roused him, and he looked at his watch. It was nearly the hour at which he had appointed to meet Mary.

He started as if he had suddenly recalled the appointment, and stood motionless, leaning against a fence.

So he stood, biting his lips, and staring at the ground for a quarter of an hour; then, looking round from right to left with a cautious, watchful scrutiny, he struck through the woods for the plantation.

When he reached the part of the road at which she had stopped him on the preceding night, he drew into the shadow of the trees, wiped his face, which was covered with a cold sweat, and in a covert, secretive fashion unbuttoned his coat, and taking a revolver from his pocket, examined it carefully.

As he was doing it, he heard a light step coming down the road, and with a quick, nervous gesture he slipped the weapon into his pocket again, and rebuttoning his coat, stood expectantly, with a forced smile on his white lips; but there was no smile in his eyes.

CHAPTER XLI.

THANE leaned against a tree, his face pale and haggard, his hand thrust into his waistcoat and pressed against his heart. It beat slowly and sluggishly, with every now and then a feverish throb, as some word or look of Lady Sybil's scornful renunciation of him flashed through his mind.

God! how he had loved her—how he loved her still! And he had thought that she loved him as he had loved her. What a fool he had been to be so deceived! It was the heir to the Chesney earldom and lands she loved. Well, he must keep the place he had usurped; he must still hold all he had stolen; hold it in spite of all—in spite of the real Lord Norman—in spite of—yes, of Mary Marshall! As he thought of her, as he listened to her approaching footsteps, his face grew dark and malignant, and an evil light crept into his eyes. All else he might fight and hope to overcome; but what was he to do with her? Half mechanically his hand went to the revolver in his pocket, and he was still fingering it when she came up beside him.

"Harry—it is you?" she said in a low, tremulous voice

"Yes, it's I, of course," he said. "You've come at last."

"You're late, aren't you?" he added; but quite at random, for he had no idea of the time.

"No," she said; "it is before the time. But I thought I would come and wait if you were not here. Oh, Harry, I wish you were as glad to see me as I am to see you!" and she clasped her hands on his arm and looked up into his face with the look a woman's face wears when she is hungering for the kiss of the man she loves.

"I'm glad to see you, of course," he said, touching her forehead with his lips. "Have—have you settled everything? Is everything arranged?"

"Yes," she said, with a sigh. "It has been a hard struggle, a terrible business; but it is done. Harry, you are safe. At least, you will be if you leave England at once—and you will, won't you? We will go to—to—" She put her hand to her head. "There is some place where they can't—can't arrest you, isn't there? Some place in Mexico where we could live buried from the world? Oh, Harry! if you will only trust yourself to me, all will be well, even now, and we shall be happy."

"That's all right," he said, with a short, forced laugh. "Of course I'll trust myself to you. Why, dash it! I can't do anything else, can I? But how did you manage it? Whom did you see?"

"I saw Miss Gordon. Ah, Harry, how cruelly you—we—have wronged her, as well as Lord Norman. My heart has ached for her ever since I knew what I know. But all her troubles are over now. She will be married to him, and be as happy as she deserves." Her eyes filled with tears. "She was very good and gentle and kind to me, Harold. She treated me like a sister, kissed me—" Her voice broke, choked by her emotion.

He nodded. While he was listening to her he could hear Lady Sybil's voice. "You beast! you thief!" rang in his ears.

"Never mind them," he said. "We have got quite enough to do to think of ourselves. Come further into the wood; some one might see us."

He led the way to the spot where the trees grew thicker. A half-stagnant pond lay shimmering in the cloudy moonlight. Mary looked around and shuddered, and put her hand timidly on his arm.

"This is my plan, Harry," she said. "You must start to-night."

"To-night?" he said in a dull, vacant way, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Yes; there is no time to lose. I—I have brought some money; I thought that perhaps you might not have enough. It is not much, but it is all I could save, and it will pay our passage across."

He nodded as she pressed a shabby purse into his hand.

"You seem to have thought of everything, old girl," he said, with a ghastly smile.

She smiled with dog-like affection up into his face.

"It is not hard for me to think, when the thinking is for you, Harry, dear," she said. "But you will go, will you not, and at once? I think it will be better for you to start alone. I can join you at Liverpool to-morrow night. We will take the first vessel that starts. You need not fear pursuit, for I have their promise."

He started slightly. His brain was confused. How was it possible for him to be calm and self-possessed with Sybil's voice drumming through his brain?

"Their promise?" he said. "Ah, yes! that confession—what do you call it?—just let me look at it and see what you've said."

She looked at him timidly, deprecatingly.

"The confession?" she faltered. Surely he understood that she had parted with it. She looked at his face and dared not tell him the truth, alas! "Presently, Harry," she said. "Let us talk of your flight. You must go now; we might be seen. Besides, I shall not be able to breathe freely until you have really started. You have the money. Say good-bye now and make your way to Liverpool. I will join you there. And—and—oh, Harry, let us pray to God that we may begin a better and a happier life!"

She laid her weary head on his breast and clung to him, the tears running down her face. He put his arm round her, but still kept his eyes fixed on the pond. Sybil's voice was still ringing in his ears. Lose her! No; not if he had to wade through blood!

"All right," he said in a strange, vacant voice. "Better go now. I'll meet you at Liverpool. Oh, yes; we shall be happy enough. You're not a bad sort, and I think you really do care for me."

A smile beautified her wan face as she lifted it to him, and she kissed him on the lips twice, then withdrew herself from his arms—which did not detain her, but released her readily enough—and went quickly from his side down the narrow path through the withered bracken.

He looked after her dully, vacantly for an instant; then.

as if he suddenly realized that she was escaping him, he pulled out the revolver, aimed it, and fired.

She stopped, threw up her arms, and with a faint scream fell on her face.

He stood for a moment looking from the smoking revolver to the prone figure, in a dazed fashion; then he sprung forward, and, kneeling by her side, raised her head, shuddering as he touched her.

It was not the first time he had looked on death, and death inflicted by his own hand, and he saw at a glance that the wound was a fatal one.

She opened her eyes after a moment or two had passed, and fixed them on him with a mute agony of reproach.

"The confession—where is it?" he demanded, hoarsely. "Give it to me."

She shook her head feebly. He set his teeth and hissed through them.

"I want it. I will have it! Where is it?"

As he spoke he searched her pocket. There was no paper there, and his eyes fastened on the bosom of her dress.

She shook her head again, and painfully opened her lips.

"It—it has gone!" she faltered, her voice thick under the pressure of Death's fingers. "I—I gave it to—to them—to-day!"

"Curse you!" he hissed, starting back, and staring from right to left, as if he already heard the voices and footsteps of his pursuers. "Curse you for a fool! You gave it to them?"

"Yes!" she panted. "Oh, Harry! it was all false, then? You—you did not love me?"

"Love you?"—he laughed hoarsely—"love you! I hated you—hated you! It was for love of another woman—"

"God forgive you, Harry!" she moaned. "God forgive you, as I forgive you—and save you! You have killed me too late, Harry—too late!"

He started to his feet, and stood staring down at her. Her eyes closed, and a faint shudder convulsed her, but, as if with a final effort, she looked up at him again, and pointed to her bosom.

"There is—is something here, Harry. Take—take it and fly! Quick—quick!"

Her voice rose to a wail at the word, but died away at its repetition. He unfastened her dress and took out the paper Madge and Mr. Levi had signed.

"It—it may save you yet!" she panted. "Take it, and— and go! Good-bye, Harry. Remember, I—I forgive you!"

Clutching the paper, he knelt beside her, his face ashen white, his eyes almost starting from his head.

With a hand that shook like the wind-swayed boughs of the leafless trees above him, he felt her heart.

It had ceased to beat! She was dead, at rest, and God grant, happy at last!

"I—I must hide it!" he muttered, thickly, as if he were speaking to some one else, to the Spirit of Murder hovering near, perhaps—"I must hide it!"

His eyes, as he stared this way and that, fell on the pool, and, with a shudder that convulsed his shaking frame, he raised the body in his arms, and carrying it to the brink, pushed and slid it amid the reeds and lilies in the stagnant water. Then he knelt and bathed his face and hands, and with averted eyes, went quickly, but shrinkingly, through the wood.

Out in the open, beneath the hurrying clouds and in the free air, he paused a moment to think.

All was over. He had lost, by his cruel and treacherous deed, even the chance of safety she had bought for him. He must, after all, relinquish Sybil, to gain whom he had committed murder. He must fly, and at once. He tore open the shabby purse and poured the contents into his shaking hand. There was more than enough, he judged, to pay his outward passage to America. He dropped it into his pocket with an oath. Up at the Chase—the great house where he had reigned as lord and master, but which he had now lost forever—there were money and jewels. Would there be time to get them? He pondered, his head clasped in his hands. Yes, he would chance it.

He walked rapidly, like a man in a dream, to the Chase, and unlocking the door from the garden, entered his den. It was dark, and he lighted a match and a candle and looked round. The sight of the safe reminded him of the lock of hair, the handkerchief, the diary. It would be well to destroy them. But, with the key in his hand, he paused. There was no time for anything but the securing of the money and what jewels he could find. Listening for a moment or two at the outer door of the room, and hearing all quiet, he went through the hall and upstairs. Only a few days ago he had drawn several hundreds from the bank, and the notes were in his bureau. He got them and thrust them in his pocket-book, then looked out his diamond studs and pins—he had been lavish in the matter of his own ornaments—and put them with the notes. Then he remembered that in the leather-covered safe in the earl's room reposed some of the family jewels—enough of them to represent several thousand pounds. The earl still kept the key of the casket, though he had surrendered all else to the supposed Lord Nor-

man. It would not be difficult to get it from him. It must be got, anyway; by force, if necessary.

With noiseless, stealthy step he left the room, and treading on tiptoe along the corridor, entered the earl's apartment.

The old man was seated in a huge chair beside the fire, sitting bolt upright, though his eyes were closed. Thane glanced at him, and seeing that he was asleep, went straight for the cabinet which stood in a corner of the room. The safe was locked, and though he had expected it, he shook the handle impatiently. As he did so, he heard the weird, guttural sound which had taken place of speech with the stricken old man, and he turned with a start to find the earl's dark, piercing eyes fixed on him. He went up to him, and laying his hand roughly on his shoulder, pointed to the casket.

"The key!" he said, abruptly, fiercely.

The earl, with his eyes still fixed on him, shook his head.

"Don't you understand, you old fool?" cried Thane, huskily. "I want the key. You've got it, I know. Out with it, and sharp! I've got no time to lose."

The earl raised his trembling hand as if to push him off, but Thane struck it aside, and forcing him back into the chair, searched the pockets of his dressing-gown. He found the key almost immediately, and held it up with a harsh laugh.

"You old fool! It's well for you I've got it without further trouble, or—" Murder gleamed in his eyes as he sprung to the casket and unlocked it.

The jewels were, some of them, inclosed in velvet cases; others were lying loose, and there was a bag containing, no doubt, the loose money the earl possessed at the time of his seizure.

Thane emptied the cases into his pocket, and added the money to that which he had got from poor Mary Marshall. Then, with wanton malice, he raised his hand to fling the empty bag at the earl's face. As he did so he heard voices on the stairs.

His heart leaped—that awful leap of the heart which the blood-stained criminal alone knows—and he shrunk back until he was leaning against the safe. The earl also heard the sound, for he turned his head toward the door, though his eyes still rested fiercely on Thane's white, haggard face.

Thane, listening intently, glanced toward the window—it was forty feet from the ground—then despairingly gazed round the room.

The voices, the confused noise of many feet, drew nearer. Suddenly the earl raised his hand and pointed to a large wardrobe. Thane stared at him in amazement for a moment—could it be possible that the old man was desirous of

helping him to escape?—then he darted across the room and slipped into the wardrobe.

He had scarcely concealed himself before the door of the room opened and a number of persons entered.

Foremost were Lord Norman and Madge. Mr. Levi followed them closely, and Robins, with several servants, pressed behind.

Lord Norman went straight to the earl and bent over him, and Madge fell on her knees beside his chair and took his hand.

"Uncle," said Lord Norman, "don't you know me?"

The old man stared at him fiercely. Then, as Mr. Levi turned up the lamp and raised it so that its light fell upon Lord Norman's face, the fierce eyes lighted up with a swift intelligence, and he let his hand fall upon Lord Norman's shoulder.

"He knows you," said Mr. Levi in a low voice.

"It is Lord Norman, your nephew," said Madge, her eyes filling with tears. "He has come back, my lord. You *do* know him, do you not?" The old man turned his gaze upon her and smiled sadly. "I am Madge Gordon," she said, her voice like subdued music. "You asked me to help you find him, and—and I helped to find the wrong man—the impostor. But it is not too late—"

Mr. Levi, who had been looking round the room, strode up to them.

"He has been here," he said, quickly. "He has been at the cabinet. Ask his lordship where he is. Ask him to point. He understands what you say, I think."

Madge shrunk from putting the question, and Mr. Levi himself put it.

"The man we are in search of—Harold Thane—has been here, my lord," he said in his quiet way. "Which way has he gone?"

The earl looked at him steadily, but remained motionless.

"Do not harass him," said Lord Norman. "Remember our compact with him, Mr. Levi."

Mr. Levi's eyes shot fire.

"Compact! Yes; but I did not agree to compound *mur—*"

As he spoke, and before he had completed the word, his eyes fell upon the wardrobe. He sprang to it, and opened the door, and in an instant had dragged Thane into the center of the room.

At sight of him the spectators uttered an excited cry and shrunk back.

Thane, white to the lips, glanced round at them, then wrenched himself free of Levi.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, fiercely. "Why do you—"

His voice failed him, and he looked with the wild gaze of a hunted animal from one to the other, until his eyes settled upon Lord Norman and rested there.

Mr. Levi straightened his crushed shirt and cuffs, and opened his lips as if about to speak, when a sudden cry from the crowd arrested his words.

The earl had risen, holding on by the arm of his chair, and stood staring at Thane.

"Let—let him go," he said in thick, guttural tones, but in a voice that was perfectly intelligible. "He—he is my son, Lord Lechmere!"

Mr. Levi turned swiftly; the crowd uttered a faint cry of amazement and incredulity; Lord Norman held Madge's arm tightly.

"He is my son," said the earl in a strange, painfully labored voice.

"What!" said Mr. Levi.

A tall, bent figure emerged from the crowd—by this time all the household had clustered into the room—and every eye was turned upon Fletcher, the steward.

"Well?" said Mr. Levi, almost impatiently.

"It is quite true, quite right," said old Fletcher in his dry, impassive manner. "This young man is the earl's only son; the heir to the Chase and the title. I knew him—the earl knew him—from the first, ever since he arrived at the Chase."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Levi, sharply, and with an astounded glance at Thane.

Old Fletcher moistened his lips.

"The earl and the countess were separated. By the terms of the separation her—their son—was to remain in ignorance of his real name and rank—"

A cry of triumph, of malignant triumph, broke from Harold Thane.

"I am Lord Lechmere!" he said. "I am the heir—the—"

Suddenly his voice grew less triumphant and died away, for in the very moment of his assertion of his rights, he met the gaze of Mr. Levi, and the sharp eye seemed to penetrate to his soul.

Old Fletcher, looking straight before him, proceeded as if he had not been interrupted.

"The countess rigidly observed the terms of her agreement, and the earl carried out his part. At one time I tried to persuade him to acknowledge his son the rightful heir, but"—he paused and looked at the earl, who sat immovable as a statue, and listening as gravely and as solemnly as if he

were a judge instead of a fellow-culprit—"but the earl was inflexible; and even if he had relented and yielded to my persuasion at that time, it would have been of little use, for the young man had disappeared. Then the countess died, and our secret seemed safe, buried forever, for she had not disclosed the story of his birth to him."

Mr. Levi looked from Thane to Harry Richmond.

"I knew there was something—some mystery," he said in a low voice. "Such a likeness was not pure accident. And when this young man—this son of the earl came back, why did you not proclaim his real identity and relationship to the earl?" he asked of Fletcher.

The old man bowed his head.

"I waited for the earl," he said in a low voice. "He made no sign, though I knew that he had recognized his son by the fact of his making a will in favor of his nephew, Norman Lechmere."

"I see," murmured Mr. Levi; then, in a still lower tone he added: "Too late!"

Thane stood, white, but for two red spots on his cheeks, and looked round with a glitter in his eyes.

"Are you satisfied—all of you?" he said, harshly. "I am Lord Lechmere—not the mere nephew"—he glanced at Norman malignantly—"but the son—the son! Satisfied or not, I shall be glad if you will leave the room—the house!"

He looked straight at Norman and pointed to the door.

Norman, who had stood perfectly silent, with Madge's hand in his, took a step toward the door, but was arrested by a movement of the earl's hand.

"Stay—stay where you are, nephew!" he said in labored tones.

"Yes, stay with him. He may have a relapse. This partial recovery is too marvelous to last," said Mr. Levi.

Then he crossed the room and whispered in Thane's ear:

"Fly! There is not a moment to lose!"

Thane bit his lip, but drew himself up haughtily.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Why should I fly? If—if you think to scare me because of anything that may have happened—anything I may have done—in the past, you make a mistake. You will find it hard to prove anything against the future Earl of Chesney."

Mr. Levi drew him aside, with his back to the rest, and fixing his sharp eyes upon him, pointed swiftly to the spot of blood on Thane's shirt cuff.

Thane started.

"What?" he began, with an attempt to bluster. "I—eat my hand."

Mr. Levi bent forward and whispered in his ear:

"Mary Marshall has left the cottage. They were tracing her toward the plantation. We came in here to warn you, to save you—that is, Norman Lechmere and Miss Gordon did. As for me—well, if they had been of my way of thinking, they would have let you take your chance."

"Mary Marshall!" said Thane. "I—I have not seen her since last night. She has gone to Liverpool."

Mr. Levi shrugged his shoulders, and seemed about to turn away; then, as if reluctantly, he caught Thane's arm and drew him out of the room.

"Lord Lechmere," he said, "unless you are bent on self-destruction, seek safety in flight at once. Man, the girl is missing! There is no cut upon your hand, but there is blood, not only on your wrist, but on your coat sleeve, and there is a revolver in that pocket." He pointed to Thane's breast, and Thane clapped his hand there. "Go quick!" said Mr. Levi.

Thane wrenched his arm away and went down the stairs. As he reached the hall there came a hurried knocking at the great door.

He stopped and stood as if powerless to move. Robins, followed by several of the other servants, came down the stairs, passed him and opened the door. Two constables stood on the step, several figures were dimly seen behind them, and something, long and vague in shape, was lying on a hurdle in their midst.

"Is Mr. Levi here?" asked the constable in an agitated voice. "Go and fetch him, Mr. Robins, for God's sake, and tell him we've found what he was afraid we should. Come in, men!"

The men, bareheaded and pale, took up the hurdle and carried it into the hall. As they did so, the cloak fell from the dead face, and Thane saw it distinctly in the light of the hanging lamp. It seemed to him as if the eyes opened and gazed at him, reproachfully, accusingly. He clutched the balustrade and staggered as if he would fall; then, as Norman and the rest came down the stairs, and Madge, seeing the body, gave a cry of terror and pity, he crouched down, and almost unnoticed in the excitement, reached the smoking-room and closed and locked the door after him.

Then suddenly he heard steps and voices coming toward the room. Some one cried, "He is in here!" and the handle was shaken. He sprang to his feet, and, with his back against the table, his teeth set, and the revolver in his hand, waited.

"Open, in the queen's name!" came the voice of the constable.

A smile flitted over Thane's face. The sentence recalled

old times. He was a bushranger once more. The smoking-room faded from his sight, and gave place to the backwoods of Australia. He smiled, and his lips opened and showed the white, even teeth set like a dog's.

"Open—" Before the sentence was finished he heard a noise behind him. Some one was tapping cautiously but quickly at the garden door. He sprung round, with the revolver pointed, listening intently; then he leaped to the door and opened it.

Silas darted limpingly in. He was white and breathless, and his small eyes, with the bruise over them, glared at Thane.

"Quick!" he gasped. "Come this way; the fools have forgotten to guard this door."

As he spoke they could hear voices shouting:

"Break the door in! Fetch a hammer and ax!"

Thane eyed him with fierce suspicion.

"Why—why do you want to help me?" he asked, hoarsely.

Silas ground his teeth.

"You fool! to waste time asking questions. What are you afraid of? Ain't I risking my own skin?"

"To save me?" Thane muttered, incredulously.

"No!" hissed Silas. "To balk him—her! Don't you see, if they hang you he'll be the viscount—the future earl. He can't be while you're alive—and once clear, you ought to know how to keep dark. Come!" He paused and looked round the room. "Money," he whispered, huskily—"have you some money? Is there any there?" nodding at the safe.

Thane shook his head. There came the sound of an ax on the door leading from the hall.

"No; I have it all here," and he touched his breast-pocket.

"Good!" said Silas. "Come along, then. By God! we'll balk them yet! I've got a dog-cart waiting in the lane. You can lie at the bottom; they'll never suspect me. Besides, I'll say I'm driving to Dexmouth for a doctor."

Hissing this in his ear, he drew him out of the room, locked the door on the outside, and flung the key into the shrubbery. They could still hear the pounding of the ax as they ran across the lawn to the spot where the dog-cart awaited them.

CHAPTER XLII.

SILAS lashed the horse savagely and they had passed through the gates safely, when suddenly a boy ran out from the footpath and called to him.

The horse started and swerved, but Silas managed to hold

him, and with an oath demanded of the boy what he wanted.

"It's a telegram for you, sir," said the lad, holding up the buff envelope. "I've been to Mr. Fletcher's house and waited there ever so long—'cause there's an answer—then they said I'd better come on to the Chase, as you might be there."

Silas snatched the telegram from his hand and held it near the lamp, but the horse fidgeted and he could not read. He took the lamp from its socket and read the telegram by it, then with a cry he dropped the lamp with a clatter into the bottom of the cart. Off started the horse, leaving the boy staring after them, and for a mile Silas had as much as he could do to prevent the animal from a sheer bolt.

"What the devil is the matter?" demanded Thane, sitting up, but without offering to take the reins; indeed, he watched what he could see of Silas's white, haggard face with grim, sardonic satisfaction.

"Matter?" said Silas, between his teeth. "I am ruined! This is from my partner. The 'corner' we were working has broken down, and—and—my God, I am utterly broke!"

"Is that all?" said Thane, with a sneer.

"Isn't that enough?" retorted Silas, with an oath.

But it was not all, for the partner had added a few words in cipher which meant "make yourself scarce."

"Wait until you are wanted for murder!" said Thane, grimly. "Here, give me the reins," he broke off, as the wheel of the trap came into collision with a curb-stone, and the vehicle swayed ominously, and he snatched the reins from Silas's shaking hands.

There was silence for a moment; then he said:

"You said you had some money, Thane. You must let me have some; you must let me have half."

Thane didn't condescend to turn his head, but simply laughed.

"You *must*!" said Silas, excitedly. "I haven't a penny beyond a pound or two in my pocket. And—and I've risked everything to save you," he said. "What's to prevent my giving you up at the first place we come to?"

Thane glanced at him with blood-shot eyes.

"Say that again and I'll put a bullet through you, or pitch you out of the cart!" he snarled. "See here!" he took out the revolver and shook it in front of Silas's face—"if you've the least idea of playing me false, get rid of it at once, for, by Heaven! at the first sign of any treachery I'll shoot you without warning!"

Silas drew back from the weapon and groaned.

They drove on at a rapid pace. Suddenly the light of a

carriage came flashing toward them. Thane kept well to his side of the road, and taking out the other lamp, flung it over the hedge.

The lights approached swiftly, and Thane drew up close to the hedge and stopped the horse.

As the carriage came abreast of them he bent down and looked at the window. A woman's face appeared at it—a fair face with golden hair.

It was Lady Sybil.

Thane started to his feet with an oath. The sight of her had moved all his passions as by some evil magic. He swung the horse round so abruptly that it reared, then lashed it into a gallop after the carriage.

Silas rose and clutched the seat.

"What are you doing? Where are you going? You are going back! Are you mad?" he exclaimed.

Thane laughed wildly, and continued to lash the horse. There was no distinct idea, desire, in his mind, only the impulse to follow the woman he loved—and hated—so intensely that in his madness he was ready to risk his neck to gain another sight of her.

Silas clambered on to the seat, and, half distraught with terror, caught the reins and clung to them.

"Let go!" shouted Thane. "I *will* follow her! I'll drag her out! I'll—"

He was foaming at the lips; his blood-shot eyes, fixed on the carriage in front of them, seemed starting from their sockets.

Silas tugged at the reins, and still clung to them, though Thane struck him a blow across the face. The inevitable result followed. The light cart, swaying violently to and fro, was run up against a curb-stone, and in another instant was overturned. Both men were thrown out, and the horse lay struggling on his side.

Silas was the first to recover the shock. He sat up with his hand to his head, and looked round. Half under the cart lay Thane, motionless. Silas crawled to him, and striking a match, held it near his face. The eyes were closed, the lips open, the white, even teeth set and clenched; the blood stood, but did not run, round a wound on the left temple. Silas rose, shivering and shuddering. Somehow, though no doctor, he knew that his companion and accomplice was dead. For a few moments he leaned against the overturned cart, trembling and shaking; then, naturally he began to think of himself. Slowly, with a mixture of eagerness and horrified reluctance, he knelt beside the dead man and emptied his pockets. The sight of the notes and the jewels gave him a little courage and spirit, and more quickly

he restored all the rest of the contents of the pockets, thrust the notes and gems into his own, and without another glance at the white, blood-stained face, set off quickly in the direction of the station.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ONE afternoon, eight months later, the young Countess of Chesney held an "At Home" at the Chase. It was the first entertainment she had given since the death of the late earl—who had never spoken again after his recognition of his son, but had slowly and in silence drifted to his rest—and the magnificent *salon* was very crowded.

Indeed, every one was there, from the county families to the doctor and the curate; and the attention of one and all was concentrated upon the beautiful girl-wife, who, still in half mourning, moved about from guest to guest, welcoming each with her sweet smile and softly musical voice.

Never very far from her side was her husband, Norman Lechmere, now Earl of Chesney; and every one remarked that though she had a smile for all, a special one was reserved for him, and that it beautified her face whenever he spoke to or touched her. Her love for him shone out from her eyes, dwelt on her lips, was eloquent in every gesture.

The "At Home" was a great success, and the crowd went to their carriages or streamed on foot through the drive, loud in their admiration of the new earl and his lovely wife, and presently the two were left standing side by side alone in the great room.

He looked at her fondly, proudly.

"Well, Madge," he said, "your first great function is over. What do you think of it?"

"It was not so terrible, after all," she said, putting her arm through his, "and I was not nearly so nervous as I thought I should have been. But then, every one was so kind. If I could only remember one half the nice things people said to me!"

He nodded and laughed.

"They said nice things to me, also, Madge," he said; "but I haven't any difficulty in remembering them, for they all harped on one string; my extraordinary luck in winning such a beautiful, charming wife—"

She put her hand on his lips, her face crimson, her eyes glowing.

"Ah, Norman, if I were only more worthy of you!" she murmured.

"Just so," he said, with a smile. "Well, I suppose I must

put up with you as you are. And now, what do you say to a stroll? Run and put your hat on."

She joined him on the steps a few minutes later, and they strolled through the park, and insensibly their feet took the direction of the little village church where barely a month ago they had been made man and wife.

In silence they went up the path and stood looking at the ivy-grown tower. There was no need for speech between them, for each was thinking of the other, of the "haunted wood" through which they had passed, of the sunlit land in which they were now dwelling. Then, suddenly, Norman, who had glanced round the church-yard, uttered an exclamation.

She followed his eyes to where they rested on a new grave-stone, and the color flitted into her face as she walked up to the grave with him.

It was a plain but massive stone, newly placed, and the recently cut inscription read thus:

"In memory of Viscount Harold Lechmere.

"Thy sins are forgiven thee. Go in peace;"

and underneath ran: "And of M. M.

"Love took up the harp of life, and smote

On all its chords with might—

Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling,

Passed in music out of sight."

In this grave lay Harold Thane and the woman who had loved him even unto death.

"You are not angry, Norman?" Madge whispered. "I ought to have asked you before I had it set up, but—but I thought—"

He put his hand—it trembled a little—on her shoulder.

"All you do is right and best, dearest," he said. "Yes, it was like you to put those words! Poor Thane! he was sinned against as well as sinning! Who is it says that 'Wrong breeds wrong?' There, let them rest together, Madge! We can forget—you and I—in our great happiness, everything save that he was of my kith and kin, and that she—"

—"Too has found her way through the wood into the sunlight beyond!" Madge whispered; and as she spoke she plucked some flowers from a bush, and tenderly, reverently, laid them on the grave.

They passed out of the church-yard hand in hand, like two lovers, and made their way, without a word, to the cottage; passed through the little gate, and went up to the door.

As they paused a moment they heard voices within, and they exchanged a glance of interrogation.

"There is some one with grandfather. Who can it be?" said Madge.

Norman opened the door and looked into the little sitting-room.

Mr. Gordon was sitting at the table, littered with papers and specimens; the room was redolent of tobacco, which came from the pipe of none other than Mr. Gerard, who was sitting at his ease in a big chair, smoking hard, and lazily watching the old man.

Madge ran across the room to him, and he gave one hand to her and the other to Norman, nodding to each with his grave, cynical smile.

"Why, how long have you been here?" demanded Madge, blushing and laughing with pleasure.

"Oh, two or three hours!" he said, preparing to lay down his pipe; but Madge took it and put it to his lips again with a laugh.

"How wicked of you not to let us know, not to come up to us!" she said, with affectionate reproach.

"Oh, I was coming up, but I heard that you had a great show on—heard it just in time, by good luck, and so I stayed where I was."

"You hermit!" laughed Norman. "I thought you had lost your shyness now that you are a great Academy swell."

For, be it known that the bust which Mr. Gerard had made of Madge Gordon had achieved a great success, and that the world of art was raving both of the "sculpter" and the "sculpted," as Tilda would have called them.

Mr. Gerard made a mock shudder.

"Don't talk of it," he said, plaintively. "Sometimes, if it wasn't for you"—he looked at her with a half-concealed admiration and tenderness—"I could wish that I'd never cut that bust. It's proved the bane of my life. Such a fuss! They send me invitations to their swell parties! I should look a pretty old idiot in a dress-coat among a lot of gaping fashionables, shouldn't I?"

"You'd look nice and pretty anywhere, you dear bear!" said Madge. "But I am so glad to see you! You and grandfather must come up and have dinner with us; mustn't they, Norman?"

"Yes, if I carry them both," was the instant response.

Mr. Gerard laughed and shook his head.

"Mr. Gordon has just ordered a grand high tea," he said. "I dare say he'll let you both stay if you ask him humbly."

"We'll stay," said Madge, "whether he asks us or not; and I'll make the toast," she added, as the neat servant whom she had engaged for the old man entered with the tray.

Norman asked Mr. Gerard for all the town news, and especially for news of that art world in which the sculptor had at last taken his proper position.

He told them a little—only a little; for, like all great men, he hated talking of himself.

"You should ask 'Tilda," he said, with a laugh; "for she knows more about the swells who come pestering than I do. She receives them and shows them round the studio; and it is better than a play to see her point to a Greek head and hear her say: 'That's 'Omer—'Omer as wrote poetry; and that's a bust of Columbiu8, as discovered Ameriky; and that there is Pokerauntus, as het Captain Smith the pirate; and the big statoo in the corner is "Trooth," doin' her back hair in a 'and-glass.'"

Madge laughed with the rest, but with an under-tone of affectionate liking and sympathy in her laugh.

"You will have to have a separate exhibition of your works in one of the rooms at Burlington House," said Norman.

"Well, I'm afraid it may come to that," said Mr. Gerard, with a sigh. "If any one considers fame to be all beer and skittles, he makes a vast mistake. You'll find that out presently, Mr. Gordon;" and he laid his hand on the old man's shoulder.

Mr. Gordon turned his absent glance upon him inquiringly, and smiling, shook his head.

"Fame will never trouble me, Mr. Gerard," he said, cheerfully enough, but with just a suspicion of a sigh.

"I'm not so sure of that!" retorted Mr. Gerard; and he got up from the table and stamped out of the room.

"Where has he gone now?" said Lord Norman.

Madge shook her head, but kept her eyes on the door, expectantly, and presently the sculptor entered with a square brown-paper parcel in his hands.

He cut the string with the bread-knife, and took out a volume bound in "green cloth, gilt-lettered," and placing it in Mr. Gordon's hands, looked down at him with a grave smile of sympathy and pleasure.

The old man took up the book, and arranging his spectacles, read the title; then he uttered a little cry, and the volume almost fell from his trembling hands.

"Why—why, it's *my* book—my book! How—how is this? You told me when you took away the manuscript that you wanted to look over it. You didn't say a word about getting it published."

"Didn't I?" responded Mr. Gerard, looking quite shamefaced. "I—I must have forgotten it."

With a cry of delight, Madge ran round to her grandfather, and hung over his chair with her arm round his neck.

"Oh, grandfather, let me look! No, no; after you, I mean! Oh! how pretty it is! how nice it looks! Oh, Mr. Gerard!" and she beamed gratitude and affection at him. "What shall I say to him, Norman? Aren't you surprised? Ah—!"

For she saw by Norman's face that he was in the secret.

"I—I thought we'd get it out quietly and without bothering him," said Mr. Gerard, still looking like a school-boy caught in the act of robbing an orchard.

"Beautiful—beautiful!" murmured the old man, turning over the pages of rich paper and clear type, and carefully drawn and colored illustrations, with fingers that trembled with excitement. "I—I had given up all hope of ever seeing it. Do you think it will be a success?"

As he spoke, a slip of printed matter fluttered from between the fly-leaf and the cover. Norman picked it up.

"It's a notice from the 'Scientific Journal,'" he said, mentioning the great authority on such a work as that Mr. Gordon had written. "Read it, Madge."

Madge read it in a voice quivering with pleasure and gratification, for it was an extremely laudatory review—just the sort of notice that sends the author of the book so spoken of into the seventh heaven.

"I thought I'd wait until the notices came out before I showed him the book," said Mr. Gerard, under his breath. "There are several others; they are slipped in between the pages, so that he'll come upon them gradually. It's going to be a great success—it is a great success already;" and he shook the hand which Mr. Gordon speechlessly held out to him.

"And you have done it all! Oh, what shall I say—what can I say to him, Norman?" Madge cried.

Norman looked from her glowing face to the red and bashful one of the sculptor, and smiled.

"I thought you women knew a better way of paying a man than in words," he said, significantly.

But he stared and laughed as Madge, crimsoning, said in a low voice:

"Oh, but I've—I've done that before!"

But she stood on tiptoe and kissed Mr. Gerard once again.

* * * * *

One evening, in the winter of that year—that happy year!—the Earl of Chesney was going home from his club in Pall Mall. He was hurrying along, his handsome head erect, his face bright and cheerful; for he was due at home for an

early dinner, having booked himself for a theater with Madge and Mr. Gerard; and being in a hurry, he scarcely noticed a ragged, hungry-looking individual who limped beside him, holding out a box of matches and whining in the orthodox fashion; but as Norman paused a moment to look at his watch, thinking that he must take a hansom, after all—something in the tone of the man's whine struck him, and he looked at him.

They were standing under a street-lamp, the light from which fell upon the beggar's face, and Norman, with a start, recognized Silas Fletcher.

"Fletcher!" he said.

The man started in his turn, and raised his bleary eyes to Norman's face, then drew back with an exclamation of fear and shame, and looked from right to left, as if meditating flight; but he remained standing and staring at Norman, his lips moving silently.

Norman was shocked by the terrible change in the man—the thin, emaciated face, the sunken eyes and trembling lips were all eloquent of drink, misery, squalor.

"It is you, isn't it, Fletcher?" he said, gravely.

"Yes, it's me, my lord," whined Silas, drawing his greasy coat-sleeve across his lips—"what's left of me, at least. I didn't know it was you, or I wouldn't have stopped you." And he turned as if to shuffle off, but Norman arrested him with a gesture of the hand.

"Wait," he said, eying him pitifully; for Norman Lechmere, though hot-tempered enough and swift to anger, was not slow to forgive; and, besides, he was happy, prosperous, while this poor wretch—

"You seem in bad case, Fletcher," he said.

Silas shook his head and groaned.

"No man is in a worse one, my lord," he whined, huskily. "I've not had a morsel to eat since—"

"How have you come down to this?" asked Norman, his pity almost hardened by the mendicant tone and manner.

"Bad luck," said Fletcher, with a dismal sigh. "Nothing but bad luck! Everything's against me." As he spoke he took off his battered hat and wiped his cadaverous brow with the dirty remnant of a red cotton handkerchief, and Norman saw that his hair had recently suffered the prison crop. "It doesn't matter where I go or what I do, it's sure to turn out wrong," whined Silas. "America, Spain, here in England, it's all the same. Luck's against me. It's want of capital."

Norman's face grew momentarily stern.

"You had the money and jewels you stole from the dead man," he said.

The seared face reddened for a moment and the bleared eyes fell.

"If they said so, they lied!" he stammered, with a miserable attempt at indignation and injured innocence.

"No matter," said Norman, gravely. "If you had them, they have brought you no good. I have no reproaches for you. No punishment I could have dealt out to you could have been more severe than this;" and he looked at the battered figure. "We will let by-gones be by-gones, and I will help you."

The dull eyes flickered greedily, and Silas extended a grimy paw. Norman dropped some money into it.

"Give me your address," he said, "and I will send you the same sum every week. Never mind," as Silas broke into a string of "God bless you's." "The address, please."

Silas gave him the name of a common lodging-house, and Norman, edging away from his oppressive expressions of gratitude, fled into a hansom.

"Why, Norman, how unlike you!—you are ten minutes late!" exclaimed Madge, as he went to kiss her—a little ceremony which he always performed on quitting or returning to the house.

"Yes, dear," he said, as he got out of his coat and gave a hand to Mr. Gerard. "Sorry; but I met an old-acquaintance, and stopped to—er—chat with him."

"Did you? An old acquaintance! How strange! Another old acquaintance! One has been here this afternoon. Look," and she took up a card from the basket and held it up to him.

"Lady Sybil Delamoor!" he said, with surprise and something not far removed from displeasure.

"Have you done with it?" she asked, as he stared at it, and she took it from his hand.

"Did you see her?" he asked.

"No," said Madge; "I was out."

She spoke from the writing-table where she had taken the card, and Norman asked her what she was doing.

"I am putting it in an envelope to send back to her," she said, quietly.

It was a severe thing to do, but she did it.

And this much may be said in extenuation: that it was the only act of severity which the friends of the Countess of Chesney ever knew her commit, for there is no sweeter-natured, no more tender-hearted woman in the world than Madge.



